Love Stories of the Real West

RANCH ROMANCES

15¢

SECOND MAY NUMBER

WIDE WATERS

BY L. P. HOLMES

Beginning a new serial

BY CLEE WOODS

NOW HE WEARS his blue suit proudly . . . and he's thrown his whisk broom away. For a long time it was brush . . . brush . . . brush to remove those telltale flakes and scales of infectious dandruff. Then he read about Listerine Antiseptic and started using it regularly, with massage.

And, Bro-ther, what a difference! Those distressing flakes and scales began to disappear like snow before the sun. His scalp felt wonderfully cool, fresh and healthy, and his hair looked the way it used to look.

Kills "Bottle Bacillus"

If you have ugly flakes and scales better get started quick with Listerine Antiseptic and massage. The flakes and scales may mean infectious dandruff. If they do, Listerine Antiseptic treats the infection as an infection should be treated . . . with germicidal action; kills millions of the stubborn "bottle bacillus" (Pityrosporum ovale) which many dermatologists say is a causative agent of the trouble.

In clinical tests, twice-a-day use of Listerine Antiseptic brought marked improvement within a month to 76% of dandruff sufferers.

You simply douse it, full strength, then follow through with a vigorous massage. No messy salves. No smelly lotions. No fuss. No bother.

Make it a "Must" Every Week

If you are smart, you won't wait until infectious dandruff gets a "head start"; you will make Listerine Antiseptic and massage a part of your regular hair-washing routine. It's a healthful precautionary measure that may spare you a nasty siege of trouble.

Listerine Antiseptic is the same antiseptic that's been famous for over 60 years in the field of oral hygiene.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Mo.*

INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF?

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC—Quick!

KIT 1 (left) I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio Soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.

KIT 2 (left) Early in my course I show you how to build this N. R. I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.

VETERANS

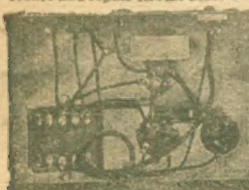
You can get this training in your own home under G.I. Bill. Mail coupon for full details.

Be a RADIO Technician

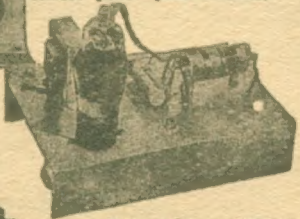
Learn by PRACTICING in Spare Time

with BIG KITS of RADIO PARTS I send you

KIT 3 You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



KIT 4 You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



KIT 5 Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.

KIT 6 You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.

My Course Includes Training in

TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS

FREQUENCY MODULATION

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to be a Success in RADIO—Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY manuals that show you how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even *greater* opportunities as public demand for Television, FM and Electronic devices continues to grow!

J. E. SMITH, Pres.
National Radio Inst.

Find Out What NRI Can Do For You

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my FREE 64-page book. Read the details about my Course, letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just MAIL COUPON NOW in envelope or paste on penny postal. **J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8EM, National Radio Institute,** *Pioneer Home Study Radio School,* **Washington 9, D. C.**

Our 34th Year of Training Men for Success in Radio

Sample Lesson 64 Page Book **FREE**

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8EM
National Radio Institute
Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, Sample Lesson and 64-page book. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Age.....

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone....State.....

☐ Check if Veteran

SECOND MAY NUMBER

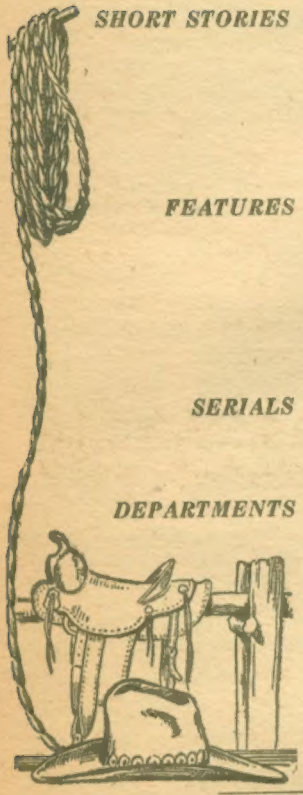
RANCH ROMANCES

May 14, 1948
Volume 145, Number 3

ON SALE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY

CONTENTS

NOVEL •	WIDE WATERS	L. P. Holmes	4
SHORT STORIES •	THE TROUBLE PROD	Wayne D. Overholser	34
	STINKER	Elsa Barker	48
	OLGA OF OLGALLALA	Ben T. Young	78
	PASS THE PEACE PIPE	William Freeman Hough	85
FEATURES •	PASSING OF THE LOBO WOLF	Jess Taylor	42
	GUERRILLA RAID, A True Story	R. T. Kingman	43
	CUPID'S PARADOX, verse	Phil Squires	53
	TEXAS HOG HEAVEN	S. Omar Barker	57
SERIALS •	EMBATTLED VALLEY, Part 1	Clee Woods	58
	MEDICINE RANCH, Conclusion	Austin Corcoran and Myrtle Juliette Corey	94
DEPARTMENTS •	KNOW YOUR WEST, a Quiz	Rattlesnake Robert	83
	CROSSWORD PUZZLE		84
	TRAIL DUST		107
	OUT OF THE CHUTES	The Editors	108
	AMATEUR PAGE	Our Readers	109
	OUR AIR MAIL	Our Readers	110
	WHOM SHALL I MARRY?	Professor Marcus Mari	112



FANNY ELLSWORTH, Editor

SINGLE COPIES, 15c YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $3.00 ($4.00 in Canada)
Send Subscription Orders to Warner Publications, Inc., 515 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

Entered as 2nd class matter Mar. 28, 1940, at Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under Act of Mar. 3, 1879. Title registered as Trade-Mark in U.S. Patent Office. Copyright 1948 by Warner Publications, Inc. Printed in the U.S.A. For advertising rates address The Newsstand Fiction Unit, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y., or 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill. The names of all persons in the fiction stories in this magazine have no reference to any person, living or dead. Ranch Romances does not assume responsibility for safe return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Issued bi-weekly by Warner Publications, Inc., 2242 Grove St., Chicago 16, Ill.
Editorial and Executive Offices, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

ELTINGE F. WARNER, President — ELMER J. CHAMBERS, Treasurer — FANNY ELLSWORTH, Secretary

How to pass a genius

All of us can't be geniuses. But any ordinarily talented mortal can be a success—and that's more than some geniuses are.

Now, as in Æsop's time, the race doesn't always go to the one who potentially is the swiftest. The *trained* man has no trouble in passing the genius who hasn't improved his talents.

In good times and bad times, in every technical and business field, the *trained* man is worth a dozen untrained ones, no matter how gifted.

The International Correspondence Schools can't make you into a genius. For more than 56 years, however, I. C. S. has been helping its students to become *trained, successful leaders*—and it can do the same for you.

Mark your special interest on the coupon. Don't be like the unsuccessful genius who wastes his life in dreaming of what he intends to do. *Act* now!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 2117-G, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ French
- ☐ Good English
- ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining
- ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician
- ☐ Power House Electric
- ☐ Ship Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician
- ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Forging
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting
- ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake
- ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric
- ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Name_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____

Age_____ Present Position_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Special discount to World War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

WIDE WATERS

BY L. P. HOLMES

IT WAS the first time that Slade Dixon had ever seen the Neland girl, and despite the weight of personal trouble riding on his shoulders, he could not deny a swift, stirring interest. He had heard that Leigh Neland was pretty, but he was hardly prepared for beauty as bright as this.

Squatting on his heels in the shade of the overhang of Duff Cowhig's trading post, Slade was waiting for Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter to show up and cut their wolves loose. When he heard the patter of hoofs coming along the alley, he was up and poised, the rifle which he had been holding across his knees, now half to his shoulder and ready. And then Leigh Neland had ridden into view and was staring, wide-eyed into that rifle muzzle.

Feeling incredibly foolish and embarrassed, Slade almost dropped the gun. Then he fumbled at his hat and said, "Sorry, ma'am. I was expecting—someone else."

She did not answer, but rode on around to a stop in front of the place, slim and straight in the saddle. On a single rope lead behind her came three pack horses, with only wadded-up tarps tied to their sawbuck saddles. And in Slade Dixon's eyes she was a beauty, so pretty that she nearly took his breath away with her hair the color of tawny wheat and eyes grey as new silver, almost. She was wearing a man's grey shirt and a divided skirt of tan whipcord, faded and well worn.

While the girl went into the store Slade went back to his original crouch against the front of the trading post, built a cigarette and smoked it in short, tense puffs. He was trying to keep his mind on the threats of Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter, but faintly, through the open door to his left, he heard the murmur of voices, Duff Cowhig's cheerful and friendly, but as hoarse and deep as a bullfrog's, and then the girl's, low but clear, and honey-rich.

The thump of Duff's peg leg sounded, and then Duff came out, a sack of flour balanced on each shoulder. The girl followed, began clearing the tarp from the pack saddle of one of the horses. Duff

She was close in his arms, her lips on his, sweet as a crushed flower

LEIGH NELAND was a girl who was eager for the unknown outside world, and Slade Dixon was a man who had been kicked out, so it was up to him to go back and make that world a safe and bright one for her

Cowhig was short and broad, and despite the handicap of his peg leg, strong as a bull. But his lack of height was a handicap in trying to load a fifty pound sack of flour on a tall horse. So he swung his head and croaked, "How's for a hand, Slade?"

Slade put his rifle aside and jumped to obey. Duff jerked his head in a nod. "This is Slade Dixon, Miss Neland. Slade, meet Mike Neland's girl, from over at Fandango Lake."

Abashed as a small boy, and savagely angry at himself for being so, Slade mumbled, "Happy to know you, Miss Neland. Sorry again about that fool play I made."

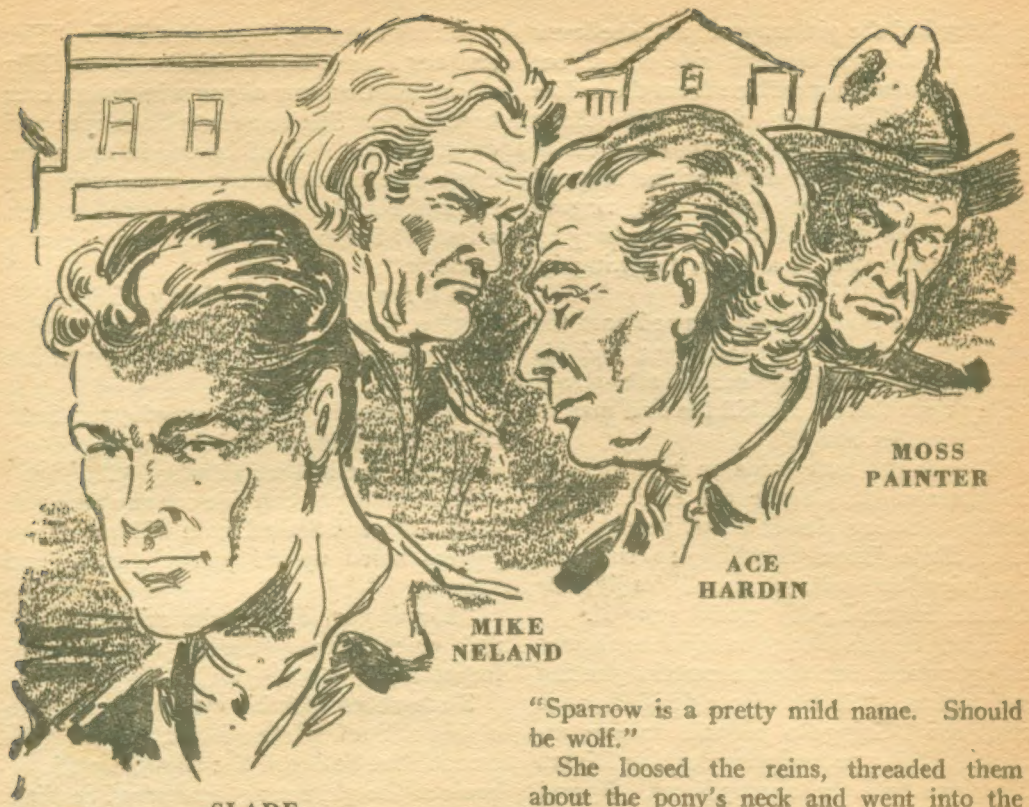
The girl did not answer, just gave a slight nod, as aloof and disinterested, Slade thought, as the North Star. But Slade didn't mind that too much. Being this close to her he could see that the curve of her lips was perfection, that her skin was so clear under its warm suntan as to almost glow.

There were six sacks of flour in all to be loaded on the pack horses, two to each horse. Then there were a lot of other supplies, sides of bacon, coffee, spices, a sack each of beans and spuds and several bundles of dry goods. Between them Slade and Duff Cowhig got the packs balanced and the tarpaulins spread over and tucked in. Then Duff stepped back.

"I'll let you throw the diamond hitches, Slade," he boomed. "I ain't the slickest hand at that business. Set 'em up to stay, because Miss Neland aims to get across the Ladrones before evenin'." Duff turned to the girl, "You want me to charge all this to your Pa, Miss Neland?"

The girl shook her head. "No, thanks," she said. "I'll pay for it now, if you'll just figure out what I owe you, Mr. Cowhig."

Duff and the girl went inside, and Slade finished with the intricacies of the diamond hitch by himself. He really put out, throw-



ing those hitches, and when he was done he knew the packs would stay put.

Moving along beside the horses, making a last test, he came to the girl's saddle mount and ran a caressing hand across the pony's sleek flank.

"Take care of her, bronc," he murmured. "Don't you stumble or go to pitching."

The pony swung a swift head and narrowly missed taking a solid nip out of Slade's arm. Failing at that the animal tried to swing a hostile pair of hoofs in Slade's direction. Slade retreated in a hurry, and his face burned red at the sound of the girl's low laugh from the trading post doorway.

She came out, pulling on a pair of worn buckskin gauntlets. And now for the first time, she spoke to Slade. "Sparrow doesn't take to strangers, Mr. Dixon."

"I can see that," grinned Slade ruefully. "Sparrow is a pretty mild name. Should be wolf."

She loosed the reins, threaded them about the pony's neck and went into the saddle with a move that was all smooth, agile grace. She gathered up the lead rope of the pack horses and then looked straight at Slade, with a smile on her lips that placed her right there in front of him, not a million miles away. "Thank you for your help, Mr. Dixon," she said.

THE NEXT moment the smile left her lips, and she swung a swift and wary head. For, spurring into the west end of Keystone's single street, came six riders. The two in the lead were Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter.

Slade, following the girl's glance, saw this, and in one jump he was over to his rifle and catching it up. The bulk of the girl's mount and the three loaded pack horses apparently hid Slade from the riders, and the yell Hutch Boalt lifted astonished him.

"Mike Neland's girl—by all that's holy! Grab her! Don't let her get away. She's outlaw, same as her father is. We get her, we got Neland where we want him!"

They had the girl trapped, and she knew it. She did not try and ride for it, but instead yanked her carbine from the saddle scabbard. The four riders with Boalt and Painter had started to close in at Boalt's order. The girl's carbine snapped to her shoulder and spat a thin, ringing report. The horse of the nearest charging rider went down in a heap, throwing its rider heavily.

And then Slade Dixon stepped past the screening bulk of the packhorses, and his words ripped harshly across the street. "Stay right there! I'll kill the first man to make another move!"

They might have come on in, if the girl had been alone, despite the exhibition of deadly shooting she had just given. But with Slade Dixon breaking so suddenly into view and with a second deadly rifle to face, Hutch Boalt's crowd stopped.

Hutch Boalt's blocky, ruddy face showed angry amazement, then a certain gloating satisfaction. "So the coyote decided not to run, eh? Going to commit suicide instead. Well, you had your warning Dixon. Now you take the consequences. Spread out, boys—and when I give the word, let him have it!"

Slade's rifle shifted slightly, then lay rock-steady in line with Boalt's thick body. "Call off your dogs, Boalt, or you'll be dead in your saddle within the next ten seconds!"

A choleric man, blind in his rages, Hutch Boalt rocked forward over his saddle horn, face suffused. But he saw something in Slade Dixon's eyes which made him settle back and call hurriedly, "Hold it a minute, boys. He can't get away."

Now it was Duff Cowhig who came thrusting past the pack horses. Duff had a sawed-off shotgun in his hands and booming thunder in his voice. "Did I hear somebody aiming to get rough with Leigh Neland? Did I? Hutch Boalt, who do you think you are? I got a notion to start spreadin' buckshot!"

MOSS PAINTER, gaunt and dark as a fire-killed pine, spoke for the first time. "That girl, she's outlaw, Cowhig. You know that."

"Outlaw my eye!" rumbled Duff. "Her and her Pa are better citizens, better folks all around than any of you whelps can ever hope to be. She came into town nice and quiet to do a spell of buying in my store. She's free to ride out the same way and the first blackleg who tries to stop her gets a load of buckshot he won't never be able to carry."

"I'll run you out of Cherry Valley, too, Cowhig," raged Hutch Boalt. "You take sides against me and see how long you last here."

"I'll take the whole top of your head off with a load of buckshot if you don't shut up," cut in Duff Cowhig. "All right, Miss Neland, you can ride out any time you want. Me and Slade Dixon will keep these jiggers holed up till you've got a good start."

"Thank you, Duff," she said in a cool and quiet voice. "Father and I won't forget this."

Slade never took his eyes or the muzzle of his rifle off Hutch Boalt for one split second, but he heard the trampling stir of hoofs as the girl swung her horses, heading around to go out through the alley. Suddenly there was a slim hand, feather-light, touching him on the shoulder, and that honey-rich voice of hers saying, "Thank you also, Slade Dixon. I won't forget this."

That did it. That made Slade feel like he stood a mile high in his socks and the width of a mountain across the shoulders. For she had spoken the personal pronoun with just the faintest emphasis. "I—won't forget this."

The girl was gone now, the sound of her horses fading up the alley. So now Slade said, "Duff, lather the first one who makes any move different that what I say. All right, Boalt swing your horse slow, near side to me. That's it. Get off. . . . Now reach—high! Stay that way. Painter, you're next."

Moss Painter could only obey and Slade went right down the line of them, naming them: Riddell, Colvin, Meeker. The one whose horse had been shot was still groggy from his heavy fall and had just struggled into a sitting position, dazed and stupid of

eye. This was Alcord. Slade moved in behind him first, lifting his gun, throwing it away in the dust. Then he moved along behind all the rest, disarming them and tossing their weapons down.

"Bunch up closer now," he ordered. "So Duff can cover you better with that sawed-off Greener of his. Watch 'em, Duff!"

"I'm watchin,' boy," grinned Duff hardily. "You're doing fine."

Slade went over to the horses. One after another of them he caught and stripped off headstall and saddle. With the keen blade of his stock knife he cut the latigos of the saddles, slashed each cinch in half. When he was done, the riding gear of Hutch Boalt and company would need extensive repairs before it could be used again. As a final move, Slade charged the horses with a yell, swinging the remnants of a ruined headstall. The horses broke and raced along the street and on out into the open range, kicking their heels at this unexpected freedom and heading for home. Hutch Boalt would organize no pursuit of Leigh Neland this day.

Slade turned back to face Boalt. He could feel the man's fury pushing out at him.

"I never asked for trouble with you at any time, Boalt," Slade said. "For that reason I've taken a lot from you and Painter, saying nothing, doing nothing. Maybe that gave you the idea I was afraid of you. Maybe I was, because I could see no sense in getting into trouble without sane cause, hoping you'd finally get some sense and leave me alone. I can see now that you never will."

"I'll see you dead at my feet," choked Boalt. "You damned young—"

"You got a bad complex, Boalt," cut in Slade quietly. "You don't own all of Cherry Valley. Your word isn't law here. You can't go on running everybody out of Cherry Valley who doesn't let you walk over them. So, keep off my heels, or the next time I look at you over the sights of a gun, I pull the trigger."

"You're wastin' your breath, boy," observed Duff Cowhig. "Hutch Boalt will never believe he isn't some kind of a king until somebody shoots his belt buckle in half."

BOALT swung his fury at Duff. "You're another I'll make hard to catch, Cowhig. Siding with this whelp, siding with that outlaw Neland girl. I'll—"

"You'll damn well let me alone, Hutch," said Duff calmly. "There are a lot of long-suffering folks in this town who are just about fed up with you and your ways. Friends of mine, every one of them, but not friends of yours. Take a look up and down the street right now. Right around two dozen folks watching this little party and just tickled into fits at seeing the high and mighty Hutch Boalt snubbed down like any other damned nuisance. The day they hear you're dead, they'll stage quite a celebration. Gents like you just ain't popular, Hutch."

"Ten miles from here to Spur headquarters," said Slade, "will be just about the right sized walk to put blisters on your heels and cool you off in the head. Get going!"

Boalt spread his thick legs, spat and stood there. Slade's rifle crashed, and the slug dug into the street inches from his left foot, kicking up a spurt of hard, sun-baked earth.

"With the next shot you lose that foot—complete," said Slade curtly. "That'll make walking harder."

In spite of his arrogant, domineering front, Hutch Boalt's nerves were far from steel. He had flinched and spun halfway around at the shot, and now a gust of laughter ran along the watching street. Boalt took a last look at Slade Dixon's eyes, saw the ice there and knew that he was a long way out on a limb that was beginning to crack. He cursed bitterly, turned and started to walk, and the others fell in behind him.

Slade Dixon followed them to the edge of town and watched until they were a quarter of a mile away, showing no evidence of trying to double back and come into town from another angle. Then Slade went back to Duff Cowhig's store.

Sandy Patch came out of his livery barn

driving a pair of harnessed freight animals. He tied on to the horse lying dead in the street and began dragging it away. "I'll stack their saddles in a corner of my place where they can pick 'em up some time later," he called to Slade. "All right by you?"

"All right by me, Sandy," answered Slade. "I'll pay you for hauling that horse away."

"Don't want no pay," grunted Sandy. "Was this Hutch Boalt I was dragging off by the heels I'd pay you for the privilege, Slade."

Duff Cowhig had gathered up the guns which Slade had taken from Boalt and the rest of the Spur crowd, had them in a gunny sack. "Yours now, boy," he said, holding the sack out to Slade.

Slade shook his head. "Chuck 'em under your counter, Duff."

"Anything Boalt and Painter threw your way before will be mild to what they'll figure on next," said Duff. "You showed 'em up bad, put the laugh on them in front of the whole town. What you aim to do?"

"Stay on in Cherry Valley and put up a fight for what's mine," answered Slade grimly.

"I'm afraid for you, boy," growled Duff bluntly.

"I'm afraid for myself," admitted Slade. "Just the same, I'm staying. Thanks for siding me, Duff. Hope it don't throw too much trouble your way. Be seeing you—I hope."

THIS WAS pretty country, Cherry Valley. Rolling range country spreading east and west in a long oval, walled on the north by the Cataract Hills and on the south by the timber-clad Ladrone Mountains. The Cataracts were dry country except in winter and early spring, while the timber slopes of the Ladrones fed water into the valley the year round. And that was the real crux of Slade Dixon's trouble with Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter.

Boalt and Painter claimed most of the range along the north rim of the valley, fronting on the barren Cataract Hills, but they wanted that year-round water along the southern valley reaches, and the tide of their spur herds was always pressing south. It was a tide which had in the past, overflowed more than one ranch holding of other men. Long ago it had uprooted Mike Neland. Now it was a tide lapping along the borders of Slade's little Rocking D layout.

For the past year Boalt and Painter had been laying the pressure on Slade a little more heavily each week and month. Slade had done his best to avoid open conflict with Spur, knowing the hopeless odds against him, trying to figure some way out and finding none. Boalt and Painter saw to that; they had this squeeze out game worked down to a science.

They worked on a man from behind the barrier of their cattle, sending their herds over a portion of a man's range, and, while he was trying to stem the tide at that point, they came in from another angle to spread over another portion. In final desperation Slade had built a fence along the north edge of his choice middle range—a barbed-wire fence which had cost him most of his cash reserve, as well as weeks of killing toil to cut fence posts up on the timber slopes of the Ladrones, to haul them down, dig holes and plant them and then string the new, bright shining wire.

It was this fence that had brought Boalt and Painter fully into the open, for one dark night a herd of Spur cattle, stampeding when a cougar came down out of the Ladrones to kill a calf, had piled into the fence at headlong speed. Morning showed a good fifty head either already dead or so badly wire cut that they had to be destroyed.

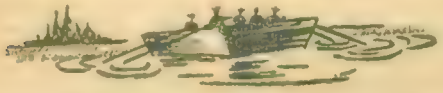
Before this, Boalt and Painter had merely let their cattle do the job for them, while they sat back with gloating mockery watching Slade Dixon fight his losing battle. But loss of the cattle infuriated them, brought them savagely into the open. They served notice on Slade, blunt notice to get out and get gone. They had even named the day, and Slade had ignored the deadline. He had made his stand, that day in town.

Slade had won the first round he knew.

because of the Neland girl, who had brought Duff Cowhig into the affair. And, once in, Duff had elected to stay in. That helped, mightily. But Slade knew that from here on in Spur would regard him as open game, a target for hot lead on sight. It was foolish to imagine that he could hope, single-handed, to match what Spur would throw against him.

COMMON sense for a long time had dictated that he leave Cherry Valley, but pride had held him, plus the hope that something would happen to cause Boalt and Painter to call off their wolves. But that something had not shown up, and this was the end. Slade knew that the sympathies of most of the folk in Keystone and of the little ranchers were with him. But he had strong doubts that any of them, with the exception of Duff Cowhig and Sandy Patch and perhaps one or two others, would risk the vengeance of Boalt and Painter.

The afternoon was beginning to run away, when he reached his cabin. In timber-shrouded defiles of the Ladrones, blue shadows were beginning to mass. Dim to the north, the rounded, barren crests of the Cataract Hills lay deceptively soft, filmed with purple haze, and all around was Cherry Valley, sweet range for man and cattle alike to live on. Only, invisible but surely there, lay the threat of Hutch Boalt and



Moss Painter, land pirates as ruthless as any who ever sailed the sea.

In view from the cabin were some of Slade Dixon's cattle, scattered along the winding length of Canon Creek. But the vast bulk of Slade's herd was scattered far, and it would mean the toil of weeks to round them all up and drift them beyond the reach of Boalt and Painter. And Slade had no time for that; he was dogged with the conviction that time was running out for him fast.

He unsaddled and turned his horse into the corral back of the cabin, then forked down wild hay from the stack for it and the three others in the corral. Then Slade went inside and stirred up an early supper for himself.

From time to time he went to the cabin door for a look around and always his rifle was close to hand, leaning against the cabin wall just inside the door.

The sun was down when Slade finished eating and got the dishes cleaned up. Ordinarily, Slade liked this time of day, when the valley was all deep blues and purples and powder grey, with the Ladrones lying black and still and restful against the southern sky line. But now Slade begrudged the approaching dark. By this time Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter would be home, plotting their vengeance strike.

The cabin, he thought, could be a trap, so he carried a couple of blankets out and hung them on the corral fence. He caught up a fresh horse and saddled it, tied the blankets across the saddle. He got his rifle and headed out afoot, leading the horse. Some three hundred yards distant, up along the creek he moved into a little pocket in the willows, where he spread his blankets, unsaddled and picketed out his horse. Then, sitting cross-legged, his back against his propped-up saddle, he loaded his pipe and smoked away the slow hours.

HE WATCHED the stars bead out, listened to the sounds of the night and sniffed the moist, cool breath of it, and found himself thinking of Leigh Neland.

A hundred times he had heard the story of Mike Neland's flight from Cherry Valley. Many years ago, that had been, when Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter had been young men.

A third man had been in the partnership of Spur, then, so the stories ran, a man named Ames. And in the night attack Spur had been thrown against Mike Neland's ranch, Neland had killed Ames, before riding in wild escape with his six-year-old daughter in his arms.

Mike Neland had thrown off Spur pursuit in the fastnesses of the Ladrones and had then dropped entirely from sight. Months later, stories got around that Mike Neland had somehow reached the Beaver

Islands out in the wide waters of Fandango Lake beyond the Ladrones, and that he had set up a headquarters there.

With the passing years many stories took shape, most of them contradictory. Some there were who claimed that Neland had gathered about him a bunch of tough, wanted men and was getting set to raid the surrounding country. And, even though these raids never occurred, Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter and enough loose mouths kept up their gossip so this outlaw talk was always alive.

What men did know for sure was that Mike Neland had built a big barge, and that he had brought cattle into the islands aboard this barge and so started up a new herd. In time, he ferried the increase over to Modoc City on the south side of the lake and sold them there.

There were three islands. East Beaver, West Beaver and Middle Beaver, and Slade had heard one tale that if a man knew the exact route to follow he might cross from the north shore of the lake to West Beaver Island with no other help than a good steady horse not afraid to swim. This story said that a horse could wade most of the distance along the crest of a series of underwater ridges which angled out toward the islands. Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter had evidently believed this, for they had made one try at crossing to the islands, only to have one rider drown and another get cut out of his saddle by long range rifle fire reaching out from the islands.

All these stories were part of the background of Leigh Neland, and it was easy to see why legend should grow about her. She was the kind of a girl a man would never forget.

The night grew colder and the silence deeper. Slade rolled up in his blankets, pillowed his head on his saddle. In spite of the turmoil of his thoughts, he was soon asleep.

He awoke to the crash of gun fire.

THE SHOOTING was down at the cabin. Slade was up and out of his blankets with a bound. It was dark, down there at the cabin, but in the blackness surrounding it, little winking gun flashes speared the night and the song of the guns was a steady roll. Then came a yell, and the circle of gun flashes closed in on the cabin.

Slade got his picketed horse and brought it over to his saddle, spotting the kak and cinching it in place by feel. Then, rifle in hand, Slade mounted and moved cautiously closer to the cabin.

Men were in the cabin now, for he could see a light shining in the window. It was an unusual light, for it grew swiftly. In the next moment Slade knew they had set the cabin on fire!

It burned fast, for its rafters and shakes were tinder dry, and the log walls were full of pitch pockets. As the flames broke through the roof, the circle of radiance grew. Slade could see the men, gathered in a group, gradually backing away from the heat of the flames.

Slade's three spare horses were bunched at the far end of the corral, wheeling and snorting in terror at the flames. A man stepped a little apart from the group, threw a rifle to his shoulder and began to shoot.

It took Slade a stupified moment to understand that he was deliberately shooting those three helpless horses! One was already down and as Slade watched a second collapsed. And now Slade saw red.

He hardly realized how his rifle got to his shoulder, but it was there and his target was that horse murderer, standing silhouetted against the flaming cabin. Slade's rifle snarled, leaping in recoil and his target went down, suddenly, as though struck by some giant, invisible hammer.

Slade swung the muzzle of his rifle in line with that dark group of men, slapping the lever of the gun back and forth, back and forth. He saw a second man go down before the group split and scattered wildly. Slade had hoped never to see his differences with Boalt and Painter go this far, but now his anger was wild and recklessness running away with him.

He saw guns begin to wink back at him, shooting at the flashes of his rifle, but all he could think of was to keep on shooting them down until there were none left.

Slade threw the shots from his rifle as

though he were driving them with physical force. He snapped the gun twice before realizing it was empty. He broke more ammunition from his saddle bags and was plugging cartridge after cartridge through the loading gate. That was when he was hit.

It was though someone had given him a sharp, hard push on the top of his shoulder, which came close to knocking him out of the saddle. It jerked his rifle from his hands and left him humped and dizzy. For a moment he couldn't think. Then, burning in at the edge of his consciousness, came the realization that the thunder of hoofs was rushing his way through the night. Instinctively Slade kneed his horse around, sunk in the spurs, lay low out over his saddle horn and rode for his life.

IN THE BLEAK, cold dawn, Slade Dixon rode out of the fringe of timber far down on the south slope of the Ladrone Mountains and saw below him the wide, still waters of Fandango Lake. He did not know exactly how he had got here. For behind him lay a night of pure hell.

It had been touch and go in that first mad dash after he had been hit and lost his rifle. Dizzy, sick, reeling in his saddle, Slade had left it to his racing horse to pick its own trail.

South the horse had raced, under the cold stars. The dark alone saved Slade, for the vengeful crowd behind him had nothing to shoot at but the thud of racing hoofs and brief, tricky glances of a speeding shadow topping some low rise of ground, then dropping from sight again in the darker hollow beyond.

With the first shock wearing off, Slade was again able to think and guide his horse, and it was toward the looming black bulk of the Ladrones that he headed. Up and across the lifting foothills and finally into the first fringes of scattered timber Slade raced, and when the black ranks of the timber swallowed him, he felt his first hope that he might really get away.

But the pack behind him harried him like wolves. A dozen times Slade thought he had lost them, but always, at the last moment, one would come crashing right at him, and Slade would make another blind dash for it. Then the sound of his going would bring them all on his heels again, lacing the black timber with lead.

It was after midnight when Slade crossed the crest of the Ladrones, and began dropping down the southern slope. His horse was moving slowly, worn and weary from the furious chase. Slade rode automatically, feeling moments of burning hotness and then shivering chill. A concerted burst of speed by the pursuing pack would have caught him now, but their mounts were even more exhausted than Slade's, after a night of angling and quartering back and forth as they herded him before them.

At last, hardly realizing it, Slade had arrived on the sweeping banks of Fandago Lake.

The water smoked with dawn mists, which gathered about the mocking bulk of the Beaver Islands in clouds of fog. At several places along the lake's edge, Slade glimpsed deer, coming down through the dawn to drink, before heading back to some covert in the timber above. A flock of wild ducks winged along the shoreline, and the plaintive crying of curlew and sandpiper and killdeer lifted. A flock of crows made noisy carnival in the gaunt branches of a lightning-killed pine and winged derisively off at Slade's approach, crying back their harsh insolence.

Slade let his weary horse drink. Stiffly he turned in the saddle, for a long look at the dawn lightened slopes above. Nothing stirred up there, but Slade knew they were still after him. They wouldn't quit and turn back now. And when they did show, he knew he was done. For they would have rifles, and he only his sixgun. They could keep their distance and pick him off without any trouble at all.

There was no way to turn but east or west, along the lake shore. Slade turned west, just to keep moving. He had no real hope of escape, caught now as he was between the lake and the mountains. From the vantage of the slope above they would see him, no matter which way he turned. He rode on in listless despair.

His weary horse tossed its head, ears pricked forward. Slade stared, wondering if he was seeing things. Here a diminishing ridge ran down the slope, pushing a low but abrupt shoulder almost to the shoreline, and as Slade rode the narrow curve of the beach between the water's edge and the end of the ridge he saw, just beyond, the fading glow of a little fire. Also, he saw horses and a single figure standing beside the fire.

"Don't come any closer! Who is it?"

The half-light of the dawn, a drift of curling lake mist, blurred the figure. But Slade knew the voice.

"Miss Neland! Leigh Neland—"

He heard a rifle lock click. "Who are you?"

"Dixon—Slade Dixon! I'm sorry—I had no idea. . . . You must get out of here. They'll be after me again any time now."

For a moment there was dead silence. Then she said, "Why are you here? How did you get here?"

"Last night," mumbled Slade thickly, "they—burned me out. They got lead into me." Slade was already turning his horse. "I'll go back. I'll head east. They'll see me and follow. That will give you a chance."

"Wait!"

She came hurrying toward him. She had her light carbine in her hands. "You are wounded?"

"It's not too bad," droned Slade. "I rode all night with it. I can keep on. I'll get out of here."

"No! Stay here. They answered my signal from the islands. Any time now they'll be—"

"You don't understand," cut in Slade. "Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter—they're the ones after me—they and a crowd of Spur riders. They're up there somewhere." He waved a weak, vague hand toward the dark lift of the Ladrones. "They'll be showing up any time. I couldn't shake them. All night—all night—no matter which way I turned—they kept—after me. I never dreamed I'd lead them—to you. I thought by this time that you be—I got to get out of here—got to lead them the other way. . . ."

Again Slade started to rein away, but she was close now and caught his horse's ring. "No! You wouldn't have a chance. You can hardly sit your saddle. We'll be all—listen!"

AT FIRST Slade could hear nothing but the faint lapping of the water along the beach, the plaintive shrilling of curlew and killdeer, the husky quacking of a wild mallard duck somewhere further along the lake edge. Then he got it, a measured creaking, a measured splashing.

The girl cried in soft relief, "The barge! Dad's coming with the barge. There's nothing to worry about now."

It might have been the significance of the girl's words, or perhaps because he was now just about at his limit. Slade began to weave in his saddle. It took everything he had to hang on to himself—a grim, silent, bitter fight. But he made it. He steadied, got his head up again.

"Out there!" exclaimed the girl. "The barge!"

Slade saw it, a dark blot against the dawn-whitened water, pushing through the mists like some misshapen giant. A voice, deep and rolling, came across the interval of distance.

"Leigh! Leigh girl! You all right?"

Her words seemed to sing as she called her answer. "All right, Dad. But hurry. Boalt and Painter and some of their men will be coming down out of the timber at any time now!"

"The devil!" growled that deep voice. "Well, let 'em. We'll give 'em what for!"

The barge seemed to move with maddening slowness. But at last there it was, nosing against the bank, with men pushing a rough gangplank down to the shore. A burly figure came hurrying down it.

"You had us worried to death, girl. I've been up all night watching for your fire signal. What kept you back?"

"One of the pack horses fell, coming across the mountains. It went dead lame. I had to switch the pack to my saddle pony and come on afoot. That took time. And—"

"Who's that with you?"

The interruption came, thin and bleak, from the lips of a second man who had come off the barge. Slade, numbed and sick, saw him lift his gun.

"Slade Dixon," answered the girl. "He just rode up. Boalt and Painter are after him. Last night—"

"What's he hanging around here for?" cut in that thin, bleak voice. "What's he tryin' to do, lead that Spur outfit tp you? If they're after him, let him ride for it. The world's wide with a lot of room in it somewhere else than here. You on the horse, get goin'!"

"That's right," growled Mike Neland. "And I'm wondering, girl, how you happen to know this fellow—his name—"

"So do I," snapped the man with the gun. He came swiftly over beside Slade, glaring up at him with a hard, challenging stare. "Who do you think you are, trailing after Leigh Neland? I've a good notion to—"

"Put that gun away, Spike," said the girl curtly. "Mr. Dixon hasn't been trailing after me. Boalt and Painter chased him across the mountains. He's hurt—they shot him. And he's going aboard the barge with us."

"He is not!" snapped Spike. "He's drifting away from here, and I mean right now!"

"That's right," rumbled Mike Neland again. "Hurt or not, we're takin' no drifting strays over to the islands. Chouse him on his way, Spike. Then we'll get Leigh's horses aboard and get out of here."

From the barge another man called, "Riders breakin' down out of the timber, Mike. Better get a move on or we might have trouble."

"Give a hand, here!" roared Neland. "Get these horses aboard!"

Four men came hurrying off the barge to take the pack horses up the narrow gangplank. Spike jabbed his gun against Slade's ribs. "For the last time," he snarled, "get! I ain't telling you again!"

A numbness was creeping over Slade, dragging him down. He rocked from side to side in his saddle. Dimly he realized that now the girl was there beside his horse, storming at Spike, pushing him away. Her indignant cry seemed to come from far away.

"Either Slade Dixon goes with us, or I stay here with him! You hear that, Dad? He helped me get away from Keystone when Boalt and Painter were after me, now I help him. I'm leading his horse on to the barge. Don't anyone try and stop me!"

Slade's own mumbling words sounded as far away to him as her voice had. "I'll drift. Don't want to cause trouble."

The girl wasn't listening. With her own hand she was leading his horse toward the gangplank. She was storming more words at her father and his men. Then his horse, snorting at unfamiliar footing, was scrambling up the gangplank.

There were rumbled orders, a hurrying of dim figures, then the creaking of long sweeps against thole pins. Somewhere in the distance a rifle cracked. Hands grabbed Slade, pulling him from his saddle. His legs wouldn't hold him, and he flattened down against the rough boards of the barge deck.

More rifle firing, coming closer now, and a yelling, thin with hate. Guns began to crack on the barge and bullets from the shore were thudding into the barge and droning overhead. One of Leigh Neland's pack animals floundered and collapsed. A man went down, half-sobbing a curse that faded swiftly.

Men were panting with furious effort, straining at heavy sweep handles. Slade rolled over, got to his hands and knees. His wounded side was stiff and clumsy, but he finally got himself propped against the heavy rail of the barge, reached his sound hand for his six-shooter, only to find it gone. Someone had taken it off him.

He slipped back down to a sitting position. The men at the sweeps were almost at a run, now, back and forth, back and forth. Water gurgled and splashed, and the morning mists closed in about the barge, thicker and thicker. The men at the sweeps were grey ghosts. The shooting and yelling from the shore seemed to be drifting farther and farther away. The shooting stopped, the yelling died. Now there was only the sound of sweep-churned

water and the measured complaint of the thole pins.

With the realization of temporary safety, a complete feeling of weakness engulfed Slade. Then came blackness, closing in like a soft blanket across his senses.

SLADE DIXON opened his eyes to flickering candle-light. He was in a bunk, covered with blankets. His shoulder was aching and stiff with bandages. He was thirstier than he could ever remember. He turned his head slowly, and the movement brought a man's figure out of the shadows.

"How are you feeling?" said a quiet voice.

"Thirsty," Slade mumbled.

A tin cup of water was held to his lips. Slade drained it, sighed with satisfaction. The man stood over him. In the thin candle-light Slade got the impression of a gaunt, hawkish face and hair grizzled to silver.

"You lost a lot of blood," said the man. "You'll get it back by staying put."

Slade closed his eyes and sleep took him.

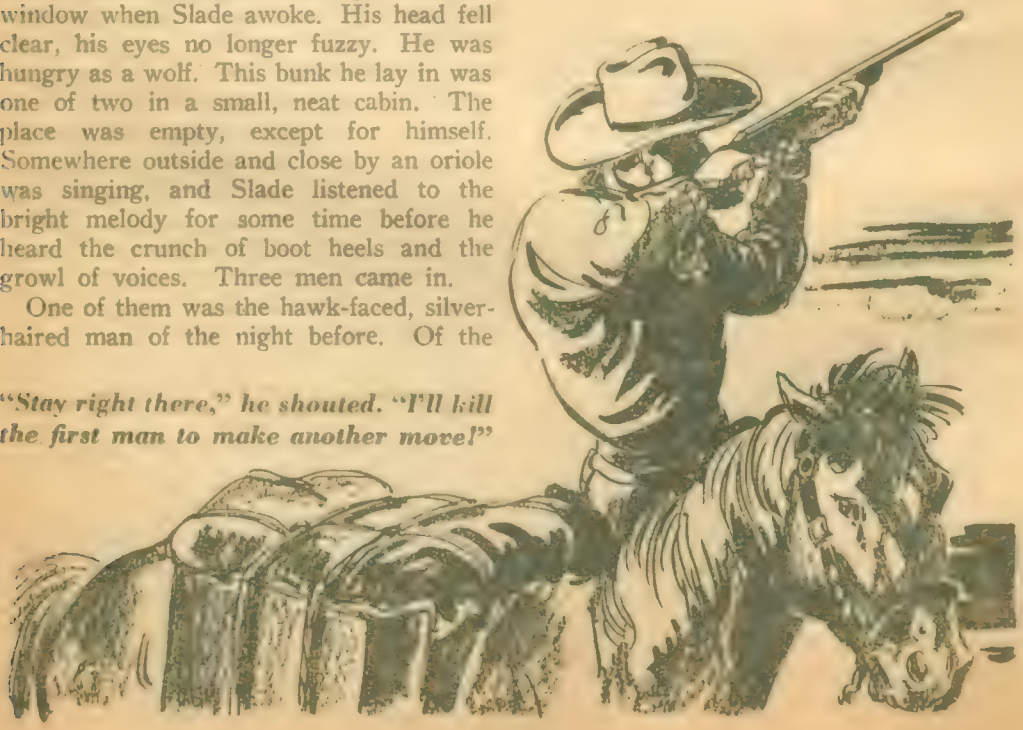
Golden sunlight was slanting through a window when Slade awoke. His head fell clear, his eyes no longer fuzzy. He was hungry as a wolf. This bunk he lay in was one of two in a small, neat cabin. The place was empty, except for himself. Somewhere outside and close by an oriole was singing, and Slade listened to the bright melody for some time before he heard the crunch of boot heels and the growl of voices. Three men came in.

One of them was the hawk-faced, silver-haired man of the night before. Of the other two, one was about Slade's own age, a year or two shy of thirty; the other a man of middle age, stocky and powerful, with a great shock of vigorous hair and a pair of hard blue eyes glinting out of a blocky, blunt-featured face. His voice rolled, deeply harsh.

"I'm Mike Neland. I want all your story on how and why you showed up on the lake shore the way you did."

The tone was jarring, and there was an implication there which tightened Slade's lips. But he told the story quietly, leaving out nothing. While he spoke he could feel the eyes of the three men boring at him intently. In the silver-haired man's glance was nothing more than deep interest. Mike Neland's scrutiny was hard, alert, and hostile. But it was what Slade saw in the eyes of the youngest of the three which startled him. Here was narrow-eyed, explosive hatred.

When Slade finished his story it was the youngest man who exclaimed, "A little too pat. He had all night to lose Boalt and Painter coming across the Ladrones, and he didn't do it. They chased him,



"Stay right there," he shouted. "I'll kill the first man to make another move!"

he'd have us believe, right up to the very spot Leigh was waiting. While Boalt and Painter showed up just too late to keep him from getting on the barge, by playing on Leigh's sympathies. Yeah, a little too pat, like a hand dealt from a stacked deck. I say he's a damned spy!"

Slade had heard this voice before. It belonged to the man called Spike.

Mike Neland jerked a brusk nod. "I'm thinking a little along the same line."

The silver-haired man said, "Ain't you both forgetting a couple of things? He did give Leigh a helping hand in Keystone, and the man's wounded. Somebody threw lead at him."

"That play in Keystone could have been faked," argued Spike hotly, "just with the idea of getting Leigh to feeling sympathetic toward him. As for the wound, what's a little shoulder crease?"

"Considerably more than a man would be likely to inflict on himself just for the purpose of fooling somebody," retorted the silver-haired man curtly. "Besides which he could have damn well bled to death. Won't do, Spike. You're talking wild. I believe his story."

"There's something to be said on both sides," growled Mike Neland. "We'll take no chances with him. He stays right here in this cabin until he's able to travel again. Then he'll be put back on the lake shore—at night. It's up to you, Ace, to see that he don't get out that door."

"He will if Hardin guards him," rapped Spike. "Give me the chore of guarding him, Mike. I'll guarantee he doesn't leave that bunk."

The silver-haired man turned and his tone took on ice. "One of these days, Spike. I'm going to stick a gun barrel down your throat. You're getting too big for your britches. Mike, you're grooming a locoed, scatter-brained fool for—"

"Let it lay!" cut in Neland bluntly. "Both of you. It will be as I say. Ace does the guarding. Spike, you'll be getting on out to Middle Beaver to help the boys with that branding chore. Tell Lambert to make a quick drag across East Beaver if he needs more two-year-olds to fill up that shipping herd. I'll be out later."

REYNOLDS threw a savage glance at Ace Hardin, then let it swing over to Slade. "I'm not forgetting he's the direct cause of Joe Roark gettin' killed, even if you two are." With that, Spike stamped out, spurs rasping.

"Ace," said Mike Neland, "I want you to quit spurring Spike. He's young, he's got to learn."

"He'll never learn," retorted Ace Hardin. "He ain't the kind to learn. Me, I can't see the plans you're building around him, can't see them at all. As far as spurring him, one of these days I'll probably kill him."

Mike Neland flared savagely. "I don't like that kind of talk, Ace. Remember, there's a limit to how far you can push into my plans. Old friends or not, I'll take just so much from you. I'm warning you."

Ace Hardin shrugged. "Suppose we understand one thing, for all time, Mike. There's one thing I'm more concerned with than anything else. In your way, you are too. But your way is wrong and mine is right. Oh, we've had a lot of this out before. But I still say I'm right and I'll see it that way, no matter what comes. Now let's quit our jawing. Dixon here is starving to death. I can see it in his eyes. I'm going to get him some breakfast."

Ace Hardin, hawk-face serene and quiet, silver-head erect, went out. Mike Neland stamped up and down the cabin, glowering. Here, thought Slade, was a bitter, stubborn man, tenacious and hard to convince.

"I'm sorry about one of your men on the barge getting killed," Slade said quietly. "I'm sorry I brought trouble to you at all, Mr. Neland. But one thing you can bet your life on—I'm not lying to you. My story is true, every word of it."

Mike Neland stared at him again, but did not speak. Then he left the cabin.

It was a bountiful breakfast Ace Hardin brought him and Slade licked it up to the last crumb. He borrowed Hardin's tobacco and papers, built a cigarette, inhaled with deep satisfaction.

"How many head of cattle you got under brand in Cherry Valley, Dixon?" asked Hardin abruptly.

"Right around five hundred," Slade told him.

"Any paper out against them?"

Slade shook his head. "Not a scrap. Or against my range, either. That's one of the toughest angles of the whole business. I just got everything cleared up, got into the open a few months ago. Seems almost like Boalt and Painter knew that and waited until it happened before really coming after me."

"You going back into Cherry Valley?" asked Hardin.

Slade nodded slowly, his jaw tightening. "Yeah, I'm going back. I admit they had me stampeded for a time there. But not now. Yeah, I'm going back."

Hardin studied him intently for a moment, then nodded. "That's the stuff." Then he added, gathering up the dishes, "When you do, maybe you'll have help."

When Hardin was gone, Slade puzzled over this abrupt statement. For that matter, he puzzled over many things, among them the brief argument that had flared between Ace Hardin and Mike Neland, and a few minutes earlier between Hardin and the explosive Spike. He tried to piece their words and attitude together and get some sort of sane answer, but without success.

The hours were slow and still. The oriole sang again above the cabin. Slade dozed, then slept and was hungry again when Ace Hardin came in at midday with more food.

"I could be up and around," Slade said.

Hardin shook his silver head. "Maybe tomorrow, not sooner. You could stand a wash. You'll probably have a visitor before long."

SHE WAS there within an hour. Trim in gingham, her hair loose across her shoulders, she seemed startlingly young, and almost girlishly shy. Ace Hardin went out, whistling softly between his teeth.

Quietly Slade said, "It's good of you to come and see me. Now I can thank you for saving my hide. You surely did it, getting me on the barge."

"I couldn't do less, after what you did for me in Keystone," she answered. "How is your shoulder?"

"Fine. And nothing, compared to the trouble I've caused. There was a man—killed on the barge?"

She nodded soberly. "Joe Roark. It wasn't your fault."

"He was killed by those who were after me, and I led them right to you."

"Still not your fault. You didn't do it on purpose."

"I'm afraid your father doesn't believe me, nor that fellow Spike."

Slade was startled at the quick, flashing vehemence of her reply. "Spike Reynolds! He wouldn't."

"For some reason he seems to hate me," murmured Slade. "I don't know why. Do you?"

A swift tide of crimson tinted her smooth cheeks. "No one ever knows why Spike Reynolds is like he is. You're sure you're comfortable?"

Slade smiled at her. "Mr. Hardin is taking the best of care of me. He says I can get up tomorrow."

She had not advanced any further than the doorway. She eyed him very gravely for a long moment, then said, "I'm glad to hear that."

Then, as swiftly as she had appeared, she was gone. Slade slept again. The cabin was full of late afternoon warmth when he awoke. Ace Hardin sat at the cabin table, silver head bent over a pair of big, black Colt guns, which he was cleaning and oiling with meticulous care. At Slade's stir Hardin came over and sat on the foot of the bunk.

"Going to need some help from you, boy," he drawled. "You're probably due for a lot of rawhiding from Spike Reynolds. Take it and say nothing, at least for a time. No reason why you can't be up and around tomorrow, but don't act too spry. There are things to be done that will take a little time, so we got to play for it."

There was mystery in these words which Slade did not understand, but there was also a clear, intent honesty in them.

Slade answered, "Whatever you say, Mr. Hardin."

The glow of a ruddy sunset tinted the cabin shadows. Ace Hardin brought Slade's supper. It was after dark when Mike Neland again came into the cabin and with him was Spike Reynolds.

"Pretty soft living for a damned spy," sneered Reynolds.

Slade said nothing, acting as though he hadn't heard the words; Mike Neland said, "Shut up, Spike!" And Reynolds stood, glowering, building a cigarette.

To Slade, Neland said, "Boalt and Painter must want you mighty bad, Dixon. They've been hanging along the lake shore all day. I've watched them through my field glasses. Do you know the answer?"

"You know the answer as well as I do, Mike," rapped Spike Reynolds. "They're waiting for a signal of some sort from this hombre."

"What possible signal could he give them, and what good would it do them if he did?" drawled Ace Hardin quietly. "Talk sense, Reynolds, or keep your mouth shut."

MIKE NELAND swung his heavy shoulders angrily. "Maybe Spike is talking sense. Boalt and Painter ain't hanging around just for the fun of it. Maybe you know the answer?"

Ace Hardin shrugged. "Maybe. Dixon has upwards of five hundred head of cattle under his brand in Cherry Valley. He's got a good chunk of range there, with range and cattle all clear of debt. Boalt and Painter know that gives him something to trade with. Maybe they're figuring he's making a trade with you, Mike, offering you a cut of his herd if you'll help him get back into Cherry Valley and establish his setup again. Maybe they're worrying about that and are setting up a guard against it."

Mike Neland shook his head. "If I'd ever figured on going back to Cherry Valley, I'd have made my try long ago. Boalt and Pain r know that, too."

"Another angle," went on Hardin. "They wouldn't know they got lead into Dixon, so that he'd be laid up for a time. They could figure that maybe tonight, under cover of darkness, we'd be putting Dixon back across the water, so he could head for Cherry Valley again, and they aim to guard against that."

"That makes a mite of sense," admitted Neland. Then, in a burst of anger he shouted, "Damn Cherry Valley and everybody in it! The place never brought me anything but trouble and misery. I never want to see it again. All I want is to be left alone to mind my own business here on these islands."

"They'll never leave you alone, Mike," said Hardin softly. "Less in the future than in the past, even. You know why. We've talked that over."

"What do I care for their damned lies?" flared Neland. "Everybody knows that all the talk about me running an outlaw hideout on these islands is a flock of lies."

"Not everybody, Mike. The old-timers who knew you in the old days, yes. But the old-timers die off and the new ones who come along to take their places, well, they listen to the story long enough, they'll come to believe it. You know the change in attitude we've bumped into at Modoc City the last couple of times out."

"Yeah, I know," snarled Neland. "Devil take all the fools! They haven't a smidgin of proof and they never will have."

"They don't need proof," murmured Ace Hardin. "All they need is the same story, told often enough, and the mystery surrounding these islands. Oh, there's no mystery as far as we're concerned, but to the outsider who has never been here, there is."

"They can't touch us here," growled Neland. "They can't put a foot on my islands."

"Maybe not, Mike. But by the same token, they can keep us from ever putting foot on shore. They can make it impossible for you to market cattle, without a fight. And, once we fight, then we are outlaws. They'll make us so. And that guarantees the finish."

NELAND waved his big arms helplessly. "Damn you, Ace! You tie me down, you choke me to death with your arguments." He whirled on Slade. "What do they say of us in Cherry Valley? Are we outlaws to them?"

"To some of them, yes," nodded Slade. "Not to all, but to some. Men like Duff Cowhig and Sandy Patch know differently. But the story that Boalt and Painter keep continually yapping is being believed more and more. I heard the story when I first hit the valley. It's grown continually. I might have believed it myself, if I hadn't been at odds with Boalt and Painter. I refused to believe anything they said. It

is like Ace Hardin says, Mr. Neland. The mystery of these islands sets men to wondering."

"But there ain't any mystery to them," rumbled Neland. "No mystery at all. Just three islands that nobody else wanted at the time. I took them over, and along with Ace and a couple more, worked like a dog to make them into a cattle spread where I'd bother nobody and have nobody bother me. What mystery is there to that?"

"None to you, of course," answered Slade. "But to those who can only see them from a distance, they *are* mystery, just like the top of an unscalable mountain peak is mystery to those who stand at the foot of it, looking up at something they can't reach."

"That still ain't answerin' why Boalt and Painter keep hangin' on out yonder," blurted Spike Reynolds. "I still say they're waitin' for some kind of word from this damned spy."

Despite Ace Hardin's warning, Slade pushed himself up to a sitting position, his face drawn and white with a sudden, cold anger. Out of him sprang hate to meet Reynold's hate. Before he could speak, Ace Hardin stepped in front of Reynolds.

"Get out of here, Reynolds, and stay out!" Ace rapped harshly. "I've had all of you I'm going to take. You heard me—get out!"

Reynolds backed up a step or two, then held his ground. "I got as much right in this cabin as you," he blustered.

"Get out!"

"Ace!" yelled Mike Neland. "What's the matter with you? Leave Spike alone. He's got—"

Ace Hardin swung his head toward Mike Neland, and there was something cold and electric in his look which stopped Neland cold. This ordinarily quiet, easy, almost gentle old-timer was suddenly a different man. In his eyes was a thin, bitter flame.

"I've let you have the run of things for a long time, Mike," he said, his words toneless, measured. "I did that because you were doing a pretty good job of things and because I knew it was in you to like to lead. But for some time now your judgment hasn't been too sharp. In some ways you've been going blind and self-centered and pretty stupid. I've tried to get you to thinking straight again by dropping hints here and there, having a mite of say about this and that. It hasn't done any good. So now I'm giving it to you straight!"

A flush of anger had been building up in Neland's face while Hardin spoke. He would have said something, but Hardin cut him short with a hard, slashing sweep of his hand, then went on.

"You didn't turn these islands into a ranch by yourself, Mike. There were four of us. You and me and Cass Erdwine and Knuckles Johnson. We had a pact—remember? That we'd set up a headquarters here and build up strength enough to go back into Cherry Valley and take over again what had once been ours. Cass and Knuckles didn't live long enough to see us ready. And the swamp fever damn near got you—and me. And Leigh—remember?"

Ace Hardin paused, his eyes brooding. His voice softened as he spoke again. "And my boy, Danny. Just a kid, too, and he didn't make it. We had plans for those

two kids, Mike. We used to talk a lot about what we'd do for them. I'm not forgetting those vows, even if you are. And though Danny's been gone these long years, there's still Leigh, and the things to be done for her. And they are going to be done, Mike, because I say they will be. Make up your mind to that—once and for all."

He turned back to Reynolds again, and now his tone had once more the bite of a whip lash.

"Get out!"

This time Reynolds went.

IT WAS good to be up and around again, though the confines of the cabin were galling. Three days had passed since Ace Hardin's blunt outburst, which had uncovered so much of the past lives of himself and Mike Neland.

Spike Reynolds had not shown up in the cabin since, nor had Mike Neland. And there was a grim watchfulness about Ace Hardin, a sort of calm but alert waiting.

Slade's strength had come back fast. His shoulder was stiff, tender to the touch, but with care he could use his arm almost as well as ever. That morning he had borrower Ace Hardin's razor and shaved. He had heated water on the cabin stove and had a hot bath in an old iron tub which Hardin brought in. Now, with a clean shirt of Hardin's on his back he had a feeling of well being and was full of a restless will to be doing things.

From the window of the cabin a clump of willows cut off all but a slight view of the lake waters and the misted bulk of the Ladrones. From the door Slade could see several other cabins, grouped about in the mottled shade of a grove of swamp alders, and in the largest and most distant one there was a flutter of colored curtains at a window.

Once he saw Leigh Neland. She was standing beside the large cabin, talking to Ace Hardin, and the sight of her quickened Slade's pulse. Abruptly he realized that she'd been almost always in his thoughts since that first day in Keystone. Other things had pressed at his mind also, but always, behind everything else, the picture of her persisted.

He was prowling the cabin endlessly, thinking of her, when Ace Hardin came quietly in.

"How'd you like a little fresh air and sunshine, son?" asked the silver-haired rider.

Slade hit his feet with a lunge. "It would save my life. I'm going loco, cooped up in here."

Hardin waved a hand. "Get out and move around."

At the door Slade paused. "I don't want to get into trouble with Mr. Neland—and I don't want to get you into trouble."

Hardin smiled briefly. "You won't and I won't. Mike's down at Modoc City with a barge load of cattle. He won't be back till tomorrow. What he don't know won't hurt him."

"Reynolds? That fellow is hard to stomach."

"With Neland. He's riding on borrowed time, Reynolds is."

Again Slade started to leave, again he turned back. "You've been damned good to me. Why?"

Ace Hardin pondered this, head down. Then he looked at Slade and said quietly, "Once I had a boy. If he'd lived, he'd have been about your age now. He'd have looked a lot like you, I think, lean and wiry." Hardin rubbed a hand across his eyes and said, his voice going low. "You'll find Leigh puttering in her little garden up past the main cabin."

Slade wandered around under the alders and among the cabins for a good half-hour before finally getting up courage to circle to the front of the larger one. The girl was there, all right, down on her knees among a few old-fashioned flowers. Her slim, soil-stained hands were still, resting on her hips, and she was staring straight away, a sober brooding on her face. She swung her head at the sound of Slade's steps, caught her breath with a little start, came to her feet in one lithe move.

"You—you—"

"Ace Hardin said I might," Slade told her. "I'm not harming a thing, or spying, or anything like that."

"It's what Dad would say if he knew. He'd be furious."

It came over Slade in a sudden, warm, reckless tide. There was a fresh, unspoiled loveliness about this girl that a man couldn't be silent about.

"I knew an old colored man one time, and whenever he saw something lovely beyond words he had one simple expression, 'It blind my eye.' That's what you do to me. You blind my eye. You make the brightest flower in this garden seem dim."

FOR A LONG moment Slade was afraid he had said too much. For she stood there, staring at him with those wide, silver-grey eyes, color coming and going in her sun kissed cheeks. Then she said simply, "Because you say that honestly, it was nice. Even though," she dimpled slightly, "you exaggerate terribly. How are you at weeding flowers?"

"Pretty clumsy, I expect. But willing to try."

"Very well. You start at that end of the row, I'll start at this. Be careful, please. They're very tender, poor things. For some reason they don't seem to be taking hold like they should."

The hate and conflict of Cherry Valley seemed a long way away, as he knelt in this black island soil, weeding a flower garden, with the fabled girl of the Beaver Islands.

Her laughter sounded, low and rich. "You can't pull weeds and look at me at the same time, Slade Dixon. Really, I'm not that important."

"You've no idea how important you are to me," vowed Slade brashly. "For years I've been seeing you in campfires, in the stars at night, and listening to you moving around my cabin when the little winds of night would come. . . . Do you realize what I'm telling you, Leigh Neland?"

She was pressing her hands together to keep them from trembling, but she was staring at him again in that wide-eyed way. "Yes," she whispered. "I realize what you're saying. And I shouldn't be listening. But—but I am."

It was as though she had said it to herself, as though she could not understand the mystery of it.

Slade straightened up and walked over to her, and she rose to face him. He took hold of her hands, and their trembling quieted in his grasp. She was staring at him as though searching the last inch of his mind for truth.

Her eyes grew luminous, her lips parted slightly. "I don't understand it, Slade—not quite. But it is true."

She seemed to lean toward him, and then she was close in his arms, her lips on his, sweet as a crushed flower.

They drew apart, shaken. Then she smiled and very softly said, "I must think on this."

She turned and ran, light as a bird and the cabin door closed behind her.

Over in the alder shade, half-hidden by the gnarled trunk of an ancient tree, Ace Hardin nodded to himself and murmured, "It was as I thought. I could see it in her eyes all the time. Well, I've waited through years for this. Now to make Mike Neland understand."

WHEN Slade, still dazed and walking on clouds, went back into the cabin that had been his prison, Ace Hardin was waiting for him. He dropped a hand on Slade's arm, turned him until the reflected sunlight streaming through the door, fell full on Slade's face.

"I saw you and Leigh," Hardin said gravely. "And I understand. . . . When Mike Neland gets back, things will happen. Let me handle them."

It was mid-afternoon of the following day when Mike Neland and his men, toiling at the sweep handles, brought the barge back from the distant southern shore of the lake. Neland was grimly silent. A wounded man was carried from the barge.

Ace Hardin was there to meet them. He glanced at the wounded man being carried by, then turned to Neland. "Well?"

"We had a ruckus," growled Neland. "A bunch tried to take the barge away from us, leave us stranded. Bledsoe was leading them."

"I'm not surprised," murmured Hardin.

"It's been building up. Bledsoe to the south, Boalt and Painter to the north, all singing the same song. Outlaw! Outlaw! And getting a lot of fools to believing them."

"But what do they hope to gain?" burst out Neland savagely. "Why can't they leave us alone?"

Hardin shrugged. "We bring fat cattle off these islands. Fat cattle mean good range. And when were Boalt and Painter and Bledsoe ever anything else but range greedy? Mike, it's like I've said over and over again. We can't stay here on these islands much longer. They won't let us. Eventually we'll lose everything if we do. We've got to move back to the mainland again, whip those who need whipping and show all men that we're not outlaws. That way we'll keep these islands and be established outside them, too. Maybe even in Cherry Valley again. . . . And something else."

Harding paused to build a cigarette.

Neland swung his head. "What else?"

"Leigh. The time has come to open the gates for that girl, Mike. All these years, almost a prisoner on these islands, knowing nothing of the outside world, surrounded by men, cut off from all association with women. The marvel of it is that she's remained so fine and sane and level-headed."

"She's been happy here," said Neland gruffly. "She'll continue to be."

"Wrong, Mike. She hasn't been happy. Now her heart leads her to the outside, and we've got to open the gates for her."

"What do you mean?"

Ace Hardin took a final drag on his cigarette, flipped the butt aside. "She's in love with Slade Dixon, and he with her."

Mike Neland jerked as though struck a blow. "You're crazy," he growled harshly. "Crazy as hell!"

"Ask her, and be gentle about it."

Black anger was building in Neland again. "I've picked the man for her. My own choice—"

"But not hers," cut in Hardin. "Never hers. She never has been able to stand Spike Reynolds. If you hadn't been blind and stubborn, you'd have realized that from the first."

"Spike's a good boy. Spike is—"

"A fool," rapped Hardin curtly. "Headstrong, wild, unpredictable. And with a mean, treacherous streak in him. He isn't fit to breathe the same air as Leigh."

"I say different," growled Neland.

"And I say—" Hardin's voice took on that dry, cold tone again—"I say that before I see Spike Reynolds destroy your daughter's happiness, I'll kill him with my own hand. I've had my mind made up to that for a long time."

Mike Neland's voice erupted thick and choked. "There's a limit, Ace, even for you. You're right on the edge of it now."

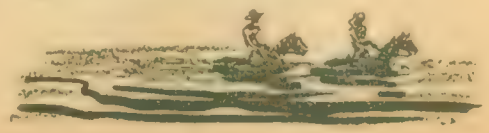
Hardin dropped a hand on Neland's arm. "We been through a lot together, you and me. I'm still your best friend. I don't want to see you make a mistake that will ride you like a curse to your grave. Go talk to Leigh, and keep your mind open."

MIKE NELAND strode away, thick, powerful, dogged. At the door of the main cabin he paused, hearing voices inside. Mainly Spike Reynolds' voice, angry and wild. Mike Neland opened the door and went in.

His daughter stood beyond the table, facing Spike Reynolds, with the table between them. The girl's head was high, her face slightly pale, her eyes flashing. Something struck deep in Mike Neland's heart. Old memories. How like her mother she was, the girl Mike Neland had married, long years ago, and who lay buried these many years, far back in Cherry Valley!

"Soften that tone, Spike," rasped Neland. "You're talking to my daughter."

Reynolds whirled. He was white and shaking with anger and jealousy. "You don't understand," he railed. "She's been seeing that damned spy—that Dixon. She—she kissed him!" Reynolds seemed to fairly strangle over these words.



"How do you know?"

"Cheney told me. He saw them."

"Is that true, Leigh?" asked Neland.

She faced him, proud and unafraid. "Yes, Dad. Why shouldn't I? I love him." There was a low, sweet dignity in her voice, and a luminous softness in her eyes.

Mike Neland said, "Scatter along, Spike. This is between Leigh and me."

"What about me?" raged Reynolds. "I thought—"

"So did I," cut in Neland. "Maybe we were both wrong. Leave us alone, Spike."

Reynolds went out, face twisted almost malignantly.

Mike Neland, strangely quiet, said, "Tell me all about it, daughter."

She did so, a trifle hesitantly at first, but her voice growing steadier as she went along, and still with that low, sweet note in it. And that luminous softness in her eyes became a quiet glory before she finished. "You mustn't be angry with Slade, Dad. With me if you wish, but not with Slade."

She saw a strange thing. She saw a great gentleness break through Mike Neland's grim mask. And she heard him say, "I'm not angry, child. Not angry with you —or him."

With a little bursting sob she ran into his arms.

Five minutes later, Mike Neland strode over to Ace Hardin's cabin. Ace was sitting in the doorway and moved aside to let Neland through. Slade Dixon stood, staring out of the window at the purpling bulk of the Ladrones. He turned quietly to face Neland, tense for the outburst of fury he was sure was coming his way. He was startled at Neland's quiet words.

"I've been talking to Leigh. I ask only one thing, son. That you be worthy of her."

Slade let out a long sigh. "To my last breath, Mr. Neland."

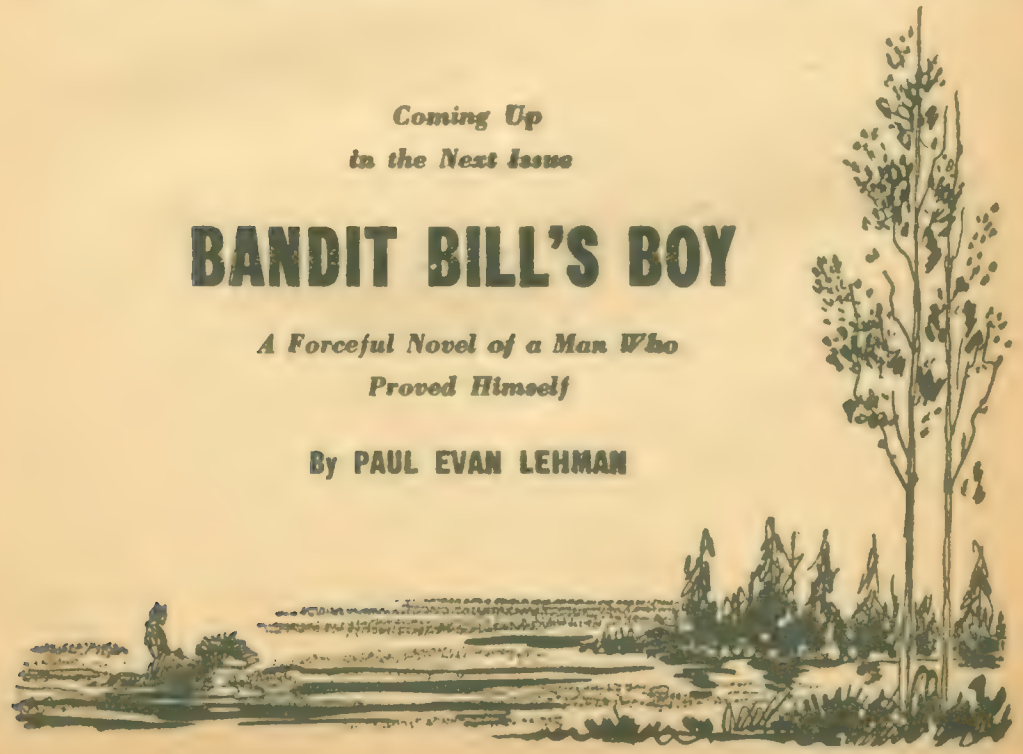
"Then that is settled. I believe you." Neland moved over to the window, gazed at the distant Ladrones. "There are things to be done. We'll turn our eyes to the north. We're going back to Cherry Valley. Leigh's future and yours are up there.

Coming Up
in the Next Issue

BANDIT BILL'S BOY

A Forceful Novel of a Man Who Proved Himself

By PAUL EVAN LEHMAN



You hear that, Ace? We're going back to Cherry Valley!"

THE MORNING stars were paling in the east when the barge nosed heavily against the lake shore. The gangplank was run out and Slade Dixon and Ace Hardin led their horses down. Mike Neland walked down behind them and stood there while Slade and Ace tightened their cinches and checked their equipment.

"In a full-out showdown," Neland said, "Boalt and Painter will have us outnumbered, so we've got to play it smart to win. Our big chance is to catch them off-balance, surprise them. We'll have to pick our position and our moves carefully. It's been many years since you or I have been in Cherry Valley, Ace, but you're long-headed in these things, and we'll work along the lines you figure out after you've had a look at things. Move careful and keep out of the way of Spur. You and Slade are just out on a scout, remember, not a two-man army figuring on licking Boalt and Painter by yourselves. Good luck!"

Neland shook hands with both of them, and then Slade and Hardin were in their saddles, riding across the lake flats and up the first lift of the slope toward the black bulk of the Ladrones above. Neland watched until the greying shadows swallowed them, then went back on the barge, ordered the gangplank in and set the men to work at the sweeps, sending the barge drifting back toward the islands.

Day was breaking fully by the time the barge reached the island. There was wood smoke curling from the chimney of the main cabin, and Neland thought of breakfast with a relish.

Big things were afoot, things to make a man's blood tingle and send his thoughts soaring. For these many years Mike Neland had tried to convince himself that he was satisfied, here on the Beaver Islands, content to live out the rest of his days here. But always, deep down, was the gnawing unrest of a proud man who had been driven from Cherry Valley, and who yearned to go back and face down Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter and reclaim what had been his.

Mike Neland was reaching for the door latch of the cabin when Spike Reynolds came around the corner of the building. "A minute, Mike. Something I want to ask you."

Neland paused, his glance going a trifle hard. "What's on your mind?" he said.

"Why," said Reynolds, "I want to know where I stand, and where Leigh stands. You gave me to understand that we—"

"I was wrong there," cut in Neland bluntly. "Dead wrong. I never had any right in the first place to plan that part of Leigh's life."

"It's that damned Dixon," snarled Spike. "Until you took him in, Leigh and me were getting along all right."

"No," said Neland. "No you weren't. Leigh never did have any use for you that way, Spike, and I was just too damn blind to realize it. You can't lay out the path of a girl's heart. No one can do that but herself. Let's face that fact, Spike. I want you to drop this fool animosity toward Slade Dixon. He's no spy, and you know it. And he happens to be the man Leigh has fallen in love with. That ends it."

"That's where you're wrong," rapped Reynolds harshly. "I don't take that kind of pushing around from you or anybody else, Neland. Don't make a move for your gun, or don't let out a yell. Else you get it, right here and now!"

Spike Reynolds' hand flickered, and now there was a gun in it, bearing steadily on the very center of Mike Neland's burly body.

For a long moment Mike Neland stared. Then he said harshly, "You poor crazy damn fool! Just what good do you think a play like this will do you? Put that gun down!"

Something that was half-snarl, half-mocking grin, cut Spike Reynolds' face. "I'm calling the turn now, Mike. Watch yourself!"

"Put that gun down or I take it away and choke you with it!"

A light that was hard and hot and deadly blazed in Reynolds' eyes. "Suppose you

get something right, once and for all, Neland. Not all the boys feel about this Cherry Valley deal like you think they do. They don't yearn to go across the Ladrones and get their hides shot full of holes just to drag some ancient chestnuts out of the fire for you and Hardin and that damned Slade Dixon. They like it right here on these islands, and they figure that after all the work they've put out helping you build things up that they're entitled to a little bigger cut of the profits. Knowing you wouldn't agree to this peaceably, we aim to take those profits our way. Yeah, Neland, you're way out on a limb and you better listen to reason."

Mike Neland's neck swelled and a bitter rage suffused his face. "You damned, treacherous, sneaking coyote! I'll show—"

"All right, Cheney," said Reynolds. "He's going to be stubborn. Let him have it!"

There was a shuffling step behind Mike Neland. He started to swing to meet the sound. That was when crashing impact took him across the head and the world went away from him; first in a blinding burst of light, then a long, thick pit of utter darkness.

SLADE DIXON and Ace Hardin used the whole of daylight to cross the Ladrones into Cherry Valley. They came up to the town of Keystone cautiously through the thickening twilight. They eased up into the back end of the alley by Duff Cowhig's trading post and left their horses there.

There was a light in Duff Cowhig's living quarters in back of the post, and the smell of cooking food was in the air. Slade knocked at the back door, and stood back outside the lane of light which was let out when Duff opened the door.

"This is Slade Dixon, Duff," called Slade softly. "I got a friend with me, and we don't want it known that we're in town. Can we come in?"

Slade heard Duff's exclamation of surprise and then Duff said, "Wait until I put out the light, Slade. Then come on in."

The light went out, and Slade and Ace Hardin slipped through the door, closing it behind them. Duff stumped around on his peg leg, saying, "Git up against the wall and stay there until I get something hung over these windows."

Presently a match flicked and the lamp was alight once more. Duff, peering across the room at them said, "Don't want to take no chances, boy. Boalt and Painter have kept one or two riders around town ever since you skinned out. Seem to figure you'd be coming back and they want to be ready for you. Who's your friend?"

"Ace Hardin."

"Well, sufferin' Moses! Ace, I wouldn't have known you. That white hair— How are you, man? And how many years, Lord, how many years—"

"A lot of them, Duff," said Ace gravely, as they shook hands. "Good to see you again."

Duff began bustling around. "Make yourselves at home. I'll rustle up some grub. By the looks of you there's things you want to talk about. We'll do that while we eat."

Slade told Duff what was in the wind. "Ace and me came to sort of scout things out. We don't want Boalt and Painter to know we're here, for that might put them on their guard, plus making it tough for us to get back across the Ladrones. You say they been keeping a rider or two in town. Where's the rest of their outfit?"

"I ain't been outside the limits of Keystone in six months," said Duff Cowhig. "But I hear things. A tradin' post and general store is as good a place to hear things as a saloon is. And from what I hear, one way or another, the main bulk of the Spur outfit have been busy roundin' up your cattle, Slade, and driftin' 'em over east into the Box Elder Roughs country."

"Which means the cattle will end up vented to Spur brand and eventually shipped out through Chancellor's Junction," said Slade bitterly. "That's pretty raw, Duff."

Duff shrugged. "Sure it's raw. It's cattle thievery on a big scale, but then Boalt and Painter get away with things like that because they got this whole valley buffaloed to death. Ain't no self-respecting person in Cherry Valley that's got a mite

of liking or use for Spur, but what can a man do? After that ruckus the day Leigh Neland was here, Boalt and Painter came to see me, breathin' fire and brimstone. I talked to them over the muzzle of my shotgun, which kept the conversation fairly polite. They made a lot of threats, but I didn't back down. They've left me alone since, figgerin' me too small potatoes to bother with, I reckon."

"What do you think our chances are of coming back into the valley, Duff?" asked Ace Hardin.

"Depends on how many men you can muster," said Duff bluntly. "If you try to come in with less than thirty, it's plain suicide."

"By scraping the barrel, we can muster maybe a dozen," said Ace drily. "That doesn't make the outlook for us seem very bright."

"You won't have a chance," vowed Duff. "Boalt and Painter are smart enough to know that they got to keep Spur strong. They know people don't like 'em, that everybody would celebrate if Spur was to come apart at the seams. I don't know exactly how many riders they got, but I'd guess it at close to forty. Remember, they're runnin' cows over every bit of good range in Cherry Valley now. That's a lot of cattle on a lot of range and it takes a lot of riders—plus an extra dozen, just for safety's sake. No, while I'd sure like to see you folks back in this valley, I ain't optimistic over your chances, unless—"

"Unless what?" asked Slade.

"Unless you can figger out a way to rub out Boalt and Painter themselves," Duff said grimly. "That's the only way Spur will ever be busted up. Once Boalt and Painter are gone, Spur will fall apart of its own weight. You cut the head off a snake, you kill the snake. The rest of it may wiggle some for a time, but that don't count. In the end, that snake dies. Spur is like that. I don't know any other answer for you boys. I do know that if you try and tackle Spur with a dozen men it'll be suicide, no less."

"If we could come in while the main part of the Spur outfit is over in the Box Elder country, like you say it is, we might stand a chance of capturing Spur headquarters," said Slade.

"What good would that do you? Boalt and Painter would call in all their wolves and surround the place. In the end, they'd get you. No, boy, it is like I said. While Boalt and Painter live, Spur will live. When they're dead, Spur dies too. That's the all of it."

ACE HARDIN nodded slowly. "Duff's right, Slade. He's given us the only answer."

"Then our chances of coming back are thin."

"Plenty thin. It will take some thinking on."

Slade stood up. "Our broncs could stand stabling and a big feed of hay and oats. I'll take 'em over to Sandy Patch's stable. Sandy's a good friend of mine."

"And you might be seen by one of Spur's scouts," grumbled Duff. "You stay right here. I'll go see Sandy and he'll come get the broncs himself. You boys can bunk down with me as long as you like. You'll have to stay inside, but it'll give you a chance to rest up before you head back across the Ladrones."

It was late before they turned in. There was a lot to talk about, but none of it brightened their chances against Spur.

Duff, always an early riser, had breakfast for them by daylight. While eating, Slade and Ace Hardin played with the decision of heading back for Fandango Lake as soon as the meal was done with, but decided instead to wait the day out and leave at dusk.

To kill time they set to work cleaning up the dishes, while Duff went out front to open the store and get ready for the day's business. They could hear him talking to an early customer or two, and then he returned abruptly, looking at them with grave eyes.

"Boalt and Painter just rode into town," he announced. "Just passed the door. They got one man with them. Probably a scout, to take the place of one they been keeping here."

Whirling around, Ace Hardin said, "Ah!" Into his eyes came a steely gleam, cold and purposeful. "I've dreamed of meeting those two face to face, calling them to account. I'll never have a better chance."

"You mean the two of us won't, Ace," said Slade.

"You stay here," said Hardin. "You got Leigh to think about, son."

"Leigh wouldn't have me if I let you try this alone," Slade said quietly. "And I wouldn't have myself. I'm going along. All or nothing, Ace."

Ace looked at him long and steady, then nodded. "I savvy, son. And you're right. Come on!"

"There'll be at least four of them," warned Duff.

"We'll never have better odds," Slade said. "What was that you said about cutting off the head of the snake, Duff?"

"You'll probably find them in the Buckhorn. It's their favorite hangout in town."

The street, when Slade and Ace Hardin stepped out into it, was empty. Three horses stood at the Buckhorn hitch rail.

Slade and Ace closed in on the place fast. There Ace halted long enough to murmur, "I'm old at this sort of thing, Slade. I know all the signs, all the moves. Let me call the turn."

They went through the swinging doors, side by side. Hutch Boalt and Moss Painter were at the bar, flanked by a rider on either side. Boalt had his head turned, talking to the one at his elbow. So it was Moss Painter, gaunt, dark, hatchet-faced, who grew restless, as though he felt a cold wind blowing against his back, and who turned to look at the door. He went stark still. But a single word broke from his startled lips.

"Hardin!"

It brought Hutch Boalt around, that word did, and a long run of breath hissed through his teeth at what he saw.

Ace Hardin said, "Glad you remember me, Painter—and you, too, Boalt. You probably know why I'm here. Well, you're right. Go for it!"

Ace Hardin stepped apart from Slade as he spoke, and he was like a grizzled old wolf, ready to spring. The two riders with Boalt and Painter seemed a trifle stupified and uncertain, waiting for their bosses to lead.

It was Moss Painter who broke, desperation twisting his dark, malignant face, trying to whirl aside as he drew. Slade, watching these four men in front of him, heard the crash of Ace Hardin's gun, while Painter was still only halfway there.

He saw Painter reel, his shoulders seeming to cave in around his chest. Then Painter was going down, limp and loose. And Hutch Boalt was frantic after his gun.

SLADE did not even remember drawing, but the recoil of the big Colt gun was driving his bent elbow back, and the thunder of it was springing out at Boalt in a solid, heavy wall of sound.

Slade saw Boalt give back a step and saw the man at Boalt's side whipping up a gun. Ace Hardin's second shot crashed, and he stumbled and fell right across in front of Boalt. Slade threw his second shot right over the falling figure, full into the middle of Hutch Boalt's thick body, just ahead of Boalt's first and last shot. Boalt was jackknifing forward as he shot and a spray of splinters leaped from the floor between Slade and Hardin. Then Boalt was down across the fallen rider, and Slade was remembering that there was a fourth man in this crowd, and so was swinging for that target.

Ace Hardin's swift words stopped him. "That's all, son—all! He wants no part of it!"

This was true. The rider's hands were climbing past his ears, his face was white and dazed and the tip of his tongue was sliding across dry lips. "I pass!" he gulped hoarsely. "I pass!"

"Smart," said Ace Hardin. "And what I want. You're to take this news to Spur. Tell 'em the head of the snake is cut off. Tell 'em that Slade Dixon and Mike Neland and Ace Hardin are coming back into Cherry Valley and that they can take the

consequences if they're still here. Tell 'em Spur is done. Done! Understand?"

The rider nodded, licking his lips again, watching Ace and Slade with a great fear in his eyes.

"Then git!" rasped Hardin.

The fellow went out, almost running, spurs clashing harshly.

Ace Hardin let the cold bitterness of his glance rest momentarily on the three men huddled before the bar. Then his eyes, still full of ice, lifted to the man behind the bar. "Any comments, friend?"

The bartender had both hands spread on the mahogany in front of him. He shook his head gravely. "If Spur ain't big enough to skin their own cats, that's their hard luck. You give 'em an even break, which is good enough for me."

"That," said Ace Hardin, with frosty dryness, "is good logic. Come on, son."

They went out into a street that was suddenly populated. Men were crowding out of every doorway, but they said no word or made no hostile gesture as Slade and Hardin walked down the street. Slade wondered if they could sense the weakness dragging at his feet, for the reaction was working on him and his knees were like water.

Duff Cowhig was over in front of Sandy Patch's livery barn, beckoning to them. "I know you made good or you wouldn't be here," said Duff, excitement deepening the bullfrog croak of his voice. "But there was one who rode away fast, and while the first heat is on, things won't be healthy in these parts for you. I'm recommendin' you drift, pronto!"

"We're riding," nodded Hardin.

"You gave 'em a chance, of course?" asked Duff.

"An even break, four against the two of us. Boalt and Painter and one rider are down."

"This is history in Cherry Valley," rumbled Duff. " Now, just give the snake time to quit wigglin,' and then you'll be welcome back."

Sandy Patch came out with their horses, saddled and ready to go. "If Boalt and Painter are done for, then I don't worry about the rest," Sandy panted.

"Then you got no worries at all," Ace Hardin said.

THEY TOPPED out on the Ladrones with, as far as they could tell, no sign of pursuit on their trail. After that they took it easy.

"Mike won't be lookin' for no signal fire until after dark," said Hardin.

Slade said nothing. He had been pretty silent all the way from Keystone. Now Hardin looked at him, saw what was in his eyes. "You have to push those things away from you, son," said the old rider gravely. "They're never pretty, but they are something a man has to do, sometimes, if he expects to hold his own. There's plenty who couldn't have stood up to it the way you did."

Hardin's words made Slade feel better, somehow they gave him a perspective he'd lacked before. He rolled a cigarette as he rode, and the drawn shadow left his eyes.

The sun went down and powder-blue mist coiled through the timber. It was dark when they broke from the trees, and the wide, still expanse of Fandango Lake lay below them, reflecting the first light of the stars.

"The folks will be at supper," said Hardin. "We'll give 'em half an hour then set our fire."

The lake gave up its sounds, the rush of wings as a wisp of shore birds scuttled by, their plaintive crying like ghost voices in the dark. A mallard duck quacked drowsily, and a bittern boomed harshly in the gloom.

They let their horses drink, and then began gathering an armful of dry refuse for their fire. That was when Slade heard a faint splashing in the lake waters to the east. He called Ace Hardin's attention and Hardin listened tensely. He swore softly.

"Sounds like somebody coming out from the island along the underwater trail."

"Underwater trail?"

"The way Mike Neland and me first got over to the islands, years ago," said Hardin. "I don't savvy this. Come on—let's get down there."

Hardin led the way along the shore, his

horse at a trot. He stopped finally on the point of a low ridge which dropped down the slope and reached into the waters of the lake. "Listen!" Hardin muttered.

It wasn't splashing they heard now, but the heavy breathing of a swimming horse. Then came an equine snort of relief, the quickening splash of a surging body and a taut little voice saying, "Good pony—good horse! You made it, you made it!"

"Leigh!" called Slade. "Leigh! This is Slade and Ace."

They heard her one sobbing cry of relief, then saw the dark bulk of rider and horse rising like some ghostly apparition from the depths of the lake.

"I prayed," wailed the girl. "I prayed that I'd find you. Oh, Slade—Slade, thank heaven!"

Slade was out of his saddle as her horse foamed up the last few yards to the point of the ridge. At the water's edge she slipped from the saddle into his arms and clung to him.

Then Ace Hardin was saying, "What is it, child? What's wrong? Whatever sent you on the wild chance of this crossing? Girl, you could have been drowned. How did you ever find the way? Only Mike Neland and I knew it."

"I learned it once, Ace, when I was a kid. I'd almost forgotten where it was, but Dad told me if I'd keep the line of Modoc Butte between my shoulders and the north star over my pony's ears, I'd make it. Once the swim was long—I thought I'd missed the underwater ridge—then the pony was wading again."

She was almost hysterical with relief. Ace caught her by both shoulders, shook her gently. "Tell us, child, what on earth is wrong?"

She steadied, gulping back her tears. "Spike Reynolds. He and Cheney and Blackie Dartt and Vic Ghilson, they've taken over the island. They got Dad a prisoner in our cabin and the other men prisoners in another cabin. They had me with Dad and they were going to kill you—you and Slade. They were going to kill you!" Her voice went off into a wail once more and again she caught at Slade and clung to him.

IN THE END they got her quiet, got her to finish the story. How Spike Reynolds had bragged to her and her father that he and his three men were going to make the Beaver Islands an outlaw hangout in fact. But first, they were going to surprise Slade and Hardin when the signal for the barge was lighted. They were going to force faithful members of the crew under gun muzzle to man the barge sweeps and answer the signal fire. And then, when Slade and Hardin came aboard, they would shoot them down without warning. After that they would put the faithful members of the crew ashore without weapons or horses and work the barge back to the islands themselves. "They were going to leave Dad and me tied up until they got back," ended the girl. "After that—I don't know—"

"They didn't expect Slade and me back until tomorrow night at the earliest, did they?" asked Hardin.

"Not until tomorrow night or the night after."

"They could do that," muttered Hardin, as though thinking to himself. "Four men could handle the barge. Slow work, but they could do it. And even when the men they put ashore finally reached Keystone or Modoc Junction and told the story, there'd be few who would really care either way enough to do something about it. That outlaw talk that's been going around has already damned us with most people. So Reynolds and his crowd would have time enough to raise hell and put a rock under it, make a deal with some crooked buyer somewhere for our cattle, probably recruit a lot more of their own stripe to side in with them. Reynolds—that dirty, treacherous whelp—"

"They had Dad and me locked in," the girl went on. "They kept a guard on the barge, thinking no one could leave the island without it. They boarded up all the windows of the cabin but the little one in the kitchen. They believed that too small for anyone to get through. I—I thought it was, too. But Dad said he thought I could make it. He told me about the underwater trail and said I had to take the chance and find you. He said that even if

I drowned, it was better than—Reynolds—" She began to shake again, and Slade held her tightly, comforting her.

"I—I got through the window. I don't know how," she said presently. "Right at dusk, it was. I slipped back to the outer corrals, got this horse. Reynolds and the others were at supper, I think. And, oh, Slade, I found you—I found you!"

Ace Hardin's voice was brittle. "We can go back the same way, Slade. Mike needs us, and I want to get at Reynolds and Cheney and those other two rats."

"Leigh—we can't leave her here," said Slade.

"She goes back with us. Neland and I found this underwater trail by watching a deer cross. We kept it to ourselves. Not even Reynolds knew, for if it ever leaked out there'd be others who'd try it, so we'd be through sleeping easy of nights. . . . Do you want to go back with us, Leigh?"

Her voice was steady as she said, "Wherever Slade goes, I go."

"I'll lead," said Hardin. "Leigh next. Slade in the rear. Give your broncs their heads. They'll follow mine. Reynolds has no knowledge of this crossing. We can surprise him. Agreed?"

"Lead out," said Slade.

It was the weirdest journey of Slade Dixon's life. The horses waded, then lunged into deep water and swam. Then, abruptly they were wading again. Then the long, long swim which Leigh had described. Then, once more the horses were wading, through water knee-deep.

The horses dropped into deep water and swam once more, but only for a short distance this time. Then once more they waded in water chest-deep. Ahead, dim against the stars lifted the sharpened crest of Modoc Butte, far out beyond the southern shore of the lake. When Slade twisted once and looked back and up, there was Polaris, winking between his shoulders. Ace Hardin was dead on this strange course.

ABRUPTLY a dark mass began to grow ahead, lifting from the placid water. And now the horses were wading once more, with the water shallow about their legs. Then there was no more water, just a stretch of reeds and rushes, then open meadow.

Ace Hardin reined in. "We made it," he murmured, coldly exultant. "Slade, we'll leave Leigh here with the horses and go in on foot. And when it is over with, Slade will come back for you, Leigh. If he doesn't come back—well, you know the way off these islands."

She was quiet as she took the reins of their horses. Slade looked up at her. "This is something I have to do," he said.

She had all her courage back now. "Yes, Slade," she answered. "This is something you have to do. I'll be waiting for you. But—be careful—for me!"

Slade followed Ace Hardin across the meadows, up to pole corrals and past them, and into the black shadow of the alder grove where the cabins were grouped. Hardin moved softly, swiftly, deadly sure of himself. Presently he paused, stopped Slade with a spread hand.

"That cabin yonder," he breathed. "Where the dim light shows. That would be where the good men are locked up. And there's a guard in front of the place. Quiet—quiet!"

Slade could barely make out the guard. Only the fact that the fellow was smoking a cigarette, the tip of which alternately glowed bright and then faded, identified him to Slade at all.

Ace Hardin took two soft steps forward, stopped again. For now sounded running steps and a man's voice calling. "The girl's gone, Cheney. She's gone. Spike says to watch yourself. She can't be far. She can't get off the island. Spike's gone out to warn Ghilson at the barge. But if she tries anything, it'll be to get them other fellows loose. So watch yourself!"

"Yeah," challenged Ace Hardin coldly through the dark. "Watch yourself, Cheney, and you, too, Dartt. This is Hardin."

Hardin's challenge brought a moment of stunned silence. Then a gun flared through the dark, once, twice, three times. Two of the slugs went overhead, high and wild. The third slashed a splinter of bark from a tree not a yard from Slade. Then, with Hardin, Slade was charging forward, shoot-

ing at where the gun flashes had been.

Slade wasn't conscious of a definite target. He wondered how Ace Hardin knew, when he yelled suddenly, "That does it for Cheney and Dartt. Now for Ghilson and Reynolds—Reynolds for sure!"

Hardin lunged away and Slade lost him in the dark. Then Ace's voice came across to him, cool and quiet. "Swing a little further out, son—and wait for them."

Slade obeyed mechanically, marveling at this ability to probe the dark enough to map a deadly strategy.

Slade found himself holding his breath, waiting. He peered into the gloom with an intentness which set up a strained ache behind his eyeballs, and he listened until a roaring set up in his ears, the thunder of his own pulse.

How many shots had he turned loose? Two—no, three. He'd better reload. . . .

He was just about to flip open the loading gate of his gun when he heard the stir of movement out in front of him. He held his breath, listening. Then, over to the left came a voice, low pitched, hoarse with strain.

"Reynolds, where are you, Reynolds? This damn dark! There's something in it, Reynolds, something I don't like."

Ace Hardin's voice cut through like a whip lash. "Something else you won't like, Ghilson, you crooked coyote!"

Then guns, blasting, splitting the night with lances of raw flame. Dimly, through the rocketing echoes, came a coughing, strangled curse.

Now a figure in front of Slade, shadowy, visible only because of its movement, crouched and stealing. Reynolds! It had to be Spike Reynolds.

Slade said, "I been waiting for this, Reynolds."

Reynolds reacted, fast as a cornered panther, shooting so fast the blare of his guns was like two steadily spurting flames. Slade, when he spoke, had gone to one knee. Now he laid the last two shots in his gun right between those licking tongues of crimson. He shot carefully, startled at his own icy coolness.

Reynolds' guns went still, and there was the soft, heavy sound of a fall.

Ace Hardin's voice came across. "Slade?"

"All right, Ace. Reynolds, he's down."

Slade got to his feet slowly, suddenly deathly weary. He knew where Reynolds was, but he didn't want to go over there. He waited, letting Hardin go.

A hand closed on Slade's shoulder, and the old gentleness came into his voice.

"The slate's clean, son. I'll be freeing Mike Neland and the other men. You go after Leigh—"

Slade found himself fairly running, back under the alders, past the cabins, past the corrals, and on into the open meadows.

Somehow the stars seemed to have grown brighter, laying a silver sheen across the night. He saw the horses, saw her, still in her saddle. He called to her and put all of the sudden welling happiness he felt into his voice.

"Leigh! It's an open trail, darling, an open trail!"

She slipped from the saddle into his reaching arms.

MAGAZINE BARGAIN

In spite of the increased cost of every item that goes into the manufacture of a magazine, we have not raised the price of Ranch Romances nor lowered the high quality of its contents. Although many magazines of this type have gone up to 25c you can still buy Ranch Romances at the same 15c price at which it has sold for many years.

STILL ONLY 15c

The Trouble Prod

By Wayne D. Overholser

THE HIGH Oregon desert has a way of making a man out of a kid fast. That happened to Tom Harker, although he wasn't conscious of it at the time. Or, if he had been, he wouldn't have understood the process by which a mysterious alchemy produced the change. If he had attempted the analysis, he would have been the last to admit it was Tildie Dawson's kiss.

It started one Saturday night after supper when the Bridlebit boys were getting prettied up for the dance in Saddle Rock. Tom seldom went. When he did, he was as out of place as the wooden Indian in front of Bucky Wills's barber shop would have been. Every time he danced it seemed as if he had ten feet, and they all came down at different times. Mostly on female toes.

Time might improve his dancing, but it couldn't fix his looks. By his own admission his face was enough to start a woman going the other way. So he canted his chair back against the wall in the far corner of the bunkhouse, built a smoke, and watched the boys get ready. He'd been on Bridlebit a year, doing this and that and learning all the time until he was considered a hand. Big Joe Kyle, the ramrod, had taken him under his wing, which was the reason Tom considered Joe just about the finest gent who ever pulled on a tall-heeled boot and set it in a stirrup.

THERE are two times no one can help a man—when he courts his woman and when he draws his gun

There was a deal of joshing and pawing around for clean shirts and razor-scratching as they whittled at a week's growth of stubble. For no good reason somebody said, "Come on, Tom. Ain't much to see in Saddle Rock but you don't want to miss what there is." Joe Kyle added his two-bits' worth, saying there might be a fight with the BC bunch, and the next thing Tom knew he was in the saddle headed for town with the rest of them.

It was dark when they hit town. They came down the street on a dead run, howling like a bunch of Piutes on a scalp hunt, shooting at the stars, and letting off the steam that had accumulated all week. They wheeled in front of the big Cooney house and started back.

Tom stared at the Cooney house every time he got close. Couldn't help wondering about it. Seemed downright wasteful for anybody to live in that big place, especially a widower like Blaine Cooney. Whatever could be said about Cooney, nobody else had ever thought of calling him wasteful.

This time as Tom made the turn he saw that the front door was open and a girl was sweeping off the porch. She was young and slim and Tom would have bet she was pretty. He built a quick dream about her, and was still working on it when they piled off in front of the Casino.

Then he called himself a fool. No use wasting his time thinking about a girl. If she was pretty, she wouldn't look at a moon-faced ugly named Tom Harker. Besides, she was likely related to old Blaine Cooney, and when she found out Tom rode for Bridlebit, she'd be done with him for sure. There wasn't exactly a war going

on between Bridlebit and Cooney's BC, but it wouldn't take much to make one.

But calling himself a fool didn't get that slim graceful figure out of his mind. He had a drink. That didn't help, either. When he couldn't stand it any longer he moved along the bar to where Joe stood and shouldered in beside him. He said, "Who's the girl that lives in Cooney's house?"

Joe put down his glass and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Name's Tildie Dawson. Nobody much knows her. Old Cooney keeps her in the house, working all the time. Damned slave driver, Cooney is."

"Why don't he hire a housekeeper?" Tom asked.

"You know the answer to that as well as me," Joe said. "He got his start working his two wives to death. This gal's Cooney's stepdaughter and she's going the same way, unless Arno Bloom marries her like he claim's he's gonna do."

Arno Bloom was BC's ramrod and a tough hand, or so he claimed. Tom frowned. "She wouldn't be no better off."

"That's right," Joe agreed. "Don't you go to getting ideas about the gal. She ain't for no Bridlebit hand. Here, have a drink."

Joe pushed the bottle at Tom, but Tom didn't touch it. It wasn't right. Every girl within fifty miles would be at the dance tonight, but this Tildie Dawson who lived within a block of the lodge hall wouldn't get to go.

She could hear the music. Chances were she listened every time they had a dance. She'd want to go. Any girl would, but old Cooney was just the kind who wouldn't let her.

It didn't take Tom long to make the decision. If Cooney wasn't home, and chances were he wouldn't be because he spent most of his time at the ranch, Tildie might go. She might even be grateful enough to dance with him.

He said, "Joe, I'm gonna ask that girl to go to the dance with me."

Joe choked on that. When he got his breath, he bellowed, "You plumb loco? I told you how it was."

"No, I ain't loco. I got to thinking. Chances are nobody ever asked her 'cause they're afraid of old Cooney."

Joe watched Tom walk out. Then he said sadly, "Boys, there goes what would have been a damned good hand. We'd better trail along and pick up the pieces."

BUT IT didn't work the way Joe guessed. Tom was carrying a wide slab of gilt-edged luck in his hands when he knocked on the Cooney door. It was the girl who answered. She wasn't as good-looking as Tom had dreamed. Cheeks too thin. Eyes too big for her face. She was slim and shapely, though, with dark brown hair and eyes that were mighty pretty even if they were too big. Blue, he guessed, although they seemed black as she stood looking at him, the lamplight to her back.

"I'm Tom Harker." He took off his Stetson. "I ain't much good at dancing, ma'am, but I'd like to take you if you'd admire to go."

Her blue eyes widened. "Mr. Harker, you don't know who I am, or you wouldn't ask. I'm Tildie Dawson. Blaine Cooney is my stepfather. I guess he'd—he'd kill the man who took me to a dance."

Tom's chest swelled. She wanted to go all right. He said, "I ain't afraid of him, ma'am."

A wistful smike broke across her face. She looked past him to the lighted windows of the lodge hall. "I've never been to a dance," she said softly, "but I listen every night when they have one, and I watch them go by the windows."

Anticipation built a fire inside him. He said, "Go take your apron off. They'll be starting pronto."

She raised her hands to her hair. "I'll have to fix up a little, Mr. Harker. Come in."

Outside Joe Kyle, standing in the shadow of the poplar trees with the rest of the Bridlebit hands, caught hold of the picket fence. "The crazy fool," he roared. "Arno Bloom will kill him even if Blaine Cooney doesn't."

Fifteen minutes later Tom walked out with Tildie. The Bridlebit riders fell in behind them. The girl's fingers closed on

Tom's arm. "Who are they?" she asked in a frightened tone.

"Bridlebit," Tom said. "The big man in front is Joe Kyle."

Tildie's fingers tightened on his arm. "Bridlebit," she whispered. "You're one of them?"

"You bet," he said proudly.

She would have turned back if he hadn't caught her shoulder. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Bridlebit," she breathed as if she thought it was a choice spot carved out of hell and dropped out here in the sagebrush. "What are they following us for?"

Resentment began to fester inside Tom. They figured he was a kid and needed looking after, but he couldn't tell Tildie that. He said, "Heading for the dance, I reckon."

She went on, her steps lagging a little, and climbed the outside stairs to the dance hall. She kept her hand on Tom's arm, and he felt her body press against him. She was looking around, nodding at some of the girls who spoke to her. He could hear her breathing. She was scared silly. She didn't need to be. He'd take care of Blaine Cooney if he started anything. Or Arno Bloom either.

Bucky Wills had his fiddle tuned up then, and he began sawing out "Turkey In The Straw." Tom looked down at Tildie, and she looked up. Both tried to grin, but neither one made it. A hole had opened up in the middle of Tom's stomach. He couldn't dance and she never had, but it was too late to back out now. He said, "Guess we'd better get at it."

"I guess we had," she said.

It wasn't as bad as Tom had figured. She was light and graceful and quick enough to get her toes out from under his feet. He'd never danced with a girl before who could do that. The first thing Tom knew he was having fun. Looked to him as if Tildie was, too. Leastwise she smiled every time she turned her face up to him, and there were two bright spots of color in her cheeks. She looked exactly the way his little sister had the day their pa brought her the doll with real hair.

"I thought you'd never danced," Tom said.

"I haven't. I've just watched through the window and practiced. By myself."

WHEN THE dance was finished Joe Kyle was on hand to ask for the next one. Tildie shrank back, scared again, but Tom said, "This here is Joe Kyle, Tildie. He's the best doggone dancer on the desert."

Joe grinned. "I don't make no brags like that, ma'am, but I sure would admire to have this dance."

So Tildie danced with Joe, and Tom, watching from the doorway, saw she wasn't scared any more. But he was. There was some talk around him, and the hole began opening up in his stomach again. Somebody said, "Blaine Cooney will beat that girl to death when he hears she came to the dance." Another man said, "I'd hate to be the hombre that fetched her."

Tom began noticing things then. Everybody was looking at Tildie and they were talking about her. Snatches of it came to him—all about the same: "Cooney says a woman is made to work, not to dance . . . . You can't blame her, penned up like she's always been. . . . Arno Bloom's bragged all summer he's gonna marry Tildie come Christmas. When he hears she came to the dance, he'll be madder'n a bear with a sore tooth."

The hole yawned wider in Tom's stomach. Snakes began sliding up and down his spine. Then the dance was over, but he didn't get to Tildie fast enough. One of the other Bridlebit boys was a couple of jumps ahead of him. Next time it was Joe again, and the time after that it was another Bridlebit hand. Then Tom caught on—they were covering up for him. Arno Bloom was likely to show up and he'd go after the fellow who was dancing with her.

All of a sudden Tom was mad. They had no call to look after him like that. It'd been his idea, and Tildie was going to be his girl if he had to chouse Blaine Cooney and Arno Bloom plumb over the Cascades.

Then it happened. Just when Joe was finishing his third dance with Tildie. There was a lot of talking and laughing and then all of a sudden a dropped pin would have clattered like a ten-penny nail. Arno Bloom

was standing in the doorway, his bullet-shaped head scarlet clear across the bald spot. He started across the floor to where Tildie stood with Joe Kyle, her face as white as her clean, freshly-starched dress.

Tom didn't take time to think it over. He knew what he had to do. He came away from the wall in long strides, angling so that he caught Bloom before the BC ramrod was within thirty feet of Tildie. He said, "What's biting you, Bloom?"

Arno Bloom wasn't as tall as Tom, but he was thicker of arm and body, and he was ten years older. He stopped, tiny red eyes pinned on Tom's face. "None of your damned business, kid," he said, and started on.

Tom stepped in front of him. "I reckon it is some of my business, punk. I'm the gent who brought Tildie to the dance."

Bloom was packing his gun. Tom wasn't. Neither was Joe nor any of the Bridlebit hands. Nobody but Arno Bloom would walk across a dance hall with his iron on his hip. He stopped now, lips flattening against his teeth, his hand moving toward gun butt. "Tildie don't come to dances. When she does, I'll bring her."

TOM SHOULD have noticed the danger signals on Bloom's face. The man was gripped by a maniacal rage that had been brought to a high flame by Tom's prodding. Then Tom threw a can of kerosene on the blaze when he said, "Maybe you ought to ask her, Bloom. It's my guess she wouldn't come to a dance with a big baboon like you."

Bloom started to pull his gun, curses rolling off his tongue in a torrid stream. Tom moved in then. He was good with his fists. He'd learned it the hard way when he'd first come to Bridlebit. Some of the boys had tried him out, and after Tom had shown he could stand up under all they had to give, Joe had taken him aside and taught him the tricks he hadn't known. Now he put to use what he'd learned.

Bloom left his face wide open when he grabbed for his gun. Tom whipped through a right that cracked Bloom on the point of the chin, the sound of it echoing across the silent hall like the thud of a butcher's cleaver on bone. It never was a real fight. Bloom didn't get organized. His blows were wild, none of them connecting. Tom was in and out, ducking and twisting and feinting, and all the time giving Bloom a steady beating.

Tom hit the BC man in the chest, rapped him on the face, slammed solid blows into his belly that brought air dancing out of his lungs. Then, when he sensed that it was the right moment, he slipped in under one of Bloom's swings and nailed him on the chin with a short whistling punch that knocked him off his feet.

"That's enough," Joe Kyle said. He'd picked up Bloom's dropped gun. "Arno, you ain't got any brains at all, bringing your fight in here. You started to pull your cutter when you knew Tom didn't have his on him."

Tom sleeved sweat from his forehead. He glimpsed Tildie's grey face and gave her a wink. Then he saw something else he didn't like. There were a half dozen BC buckaroos in the room, but they were all lined along the wall by the door, the Bridlebit hands in front of them. It had come mighty near being a free-for-all.

Bloom sat up and swiped at the blood spreading along his upper lip. He breathed, "All right, Kyle. I'm taking Tildie home now."

"The hell you are." Tom started toward Bloom again. "I brought her, and I'll take her home when she's ready. Not before."

Joe caught Tom's shoulder. "Take it easy, kid. Arno's had enough for tonight. Maybe Tildie's ready now."

"Of course." Tildie was standing beside Tom, her scornful gaze knifing Bloom. "You're a disgrace to your spread, Arno. Come on, Tom."

They walked out together, Tildie's head high, her hand on his arm as if it belonged there. They went down the stairs together and along the boardwalk to the big Cooney house. Neither one said a word until they reached the gate. Then Tildie looked up at him, and Tom thought she was prettier than any dreams he could make about her.

"Thank you for taking me, Tom," she breathed. "I had a good time until Arno came, the best time I ever had,I guess, but

I shouldn't have let you take me. You'll have to leave the country now."

"I ain't doing no such thing," Tom said quickly. He put his arms around her. "You don't belong here with a mean old devil like Cooney, and you ain't gonna marry Arno like he figgers. You're gonna marry me."

"I can't do that, Tom," she whispered, "but I'll never forget you."

SHE LIFTED her lips to his then. He'd never kissed a girl before, but he was doing it now without thought of what he was getting into. The next thing he knew she was out of his arms and running up the path and slamming the door. The pressure of her lips was a lingering sweetness in his memory. He swung around and started back to the dance. He was going to marry Tildie Dawson. Old Blaine Cooney and Arno Bloom and the whole BC outfit wouldn't stop him.

Tom was in front of the Casino before he caught on to what was happening. The BC hands were knotted at the foot of the stairway. Bridlebit formed a solid wall in front of them. Kyle was saying ominously, "You've been trying to work up a fight for a long time, Arno. I reckon you'll get it, but not tonight."

"You're a yellow bunch of punks to be calling yourselves cow-hands," Bloom raged. "Go get your irons and come a-smoking."

"Just one thing's stopping us," Joe said. "The old man says we ain't to fight. He's got no argument with Cooney. If there is a ruckus, it'll be of Cooney's making. We're gonna get a drink, Arno. Then we're riding out."

Joe started to turn into the Casino and stopped when Bloom said, "If that Harker kid shows up next Saturday night, he'd better have his iron on."

"Don't push that, Arno," Joe warned.

Tom shouldered through the Bridlebit men until he stood beside Joe. He wasn't much good with a gun. Accurate enough but slow. It was like his dancing, just something he couldn't seem to learn, and Arno Bloom had the reputation of being the fastest man on the desert outside of Joe Kyle himself.

Tom felt the big hole opening up in his stomach again. Snakes were sliding up and down his spine. A lot of them. If it was just himself, he could ride out of the country. But it was more than that. It was his outfit now, Bridlebit against BC, and it had been Tom Harker who had stirred it up all along the line.

"I heard that, Bloom," Tom said, his voice shaking a little in spite of all he could do. "I'll be here."

"Come on." Joe gripped Tom's arm. "Let's have a drink."

Bridlebit lined up along the bar in the Casino. "The night's just a pup yet," Tom said. "What're we going home for?"

He knew, all right. The hole had closed up in his stomach. The snakes had stopped traveling up and down his backbone. Anger was the right cure for those ailments.

"So we can go to bed," Joe said testily.

Tom slapped an open hand against the bar top. "You don't need to keep playing nurse for me," he shouted. "I knew what you were up to when you followed us down the street from Cooney's house. I knew what you were doing when you kept me from dancing with her. I'm sick and tired of it. This is my ruckus and I'm gonna finish it."

Joe said, "Let's ride," and strode out.

Tom went along, but he was sick. He was a man to Tildie Dawson. He was a man to everybody in the lodge hall when he'd beaten Arno Bloom. Everybody but Joe. He was still a kid to the one man whose respect he wanted above everybody else's.

The old man was still up when they got home. Joe reined to a stop in front of the house. Tom swung his horse in beside him, and when the rest had gone on to the corral, he asked, "What'd I do wrong, Joe? I ain't asking for no help."

JOE DIDN'T answer for a minute. He stepped down and looped the reins over the pole. He built a smoke and when he struck a match to light it, Tom saw that there was a tightness about his face he had never seen before.

"It's hard to tell you, son," Joe said finally. "It's something you learn after you buckaroo awhile, something you can't say in words." The tip of his cigarette glowed red as he took a deep drag. "An outfit's like an army. We've got to hang together. When one fellow. . . . Aw, hell, you'll know what I'm trying to tell you in another ten years." Joe stepped around the hitch pole and walked into the house.

Tom put his horse away, but he didn't go to bed. He walked around aimlessly, smoking one cigarette after another. The light was still in the old man's office. Maybe the old man could tell him. He threw his cigarette stub away and moved around a locust tree. Then he stopped. The door was open, and he heard Joe say, "It was the finest piece of fighting I ever saw. The kid had Bloom swinging wild but he never missed a punch. I dunno what that girl done to him, but she sure put him on the prod."

"I feel sorry for the girl just like I felt sorry for Cooney's wives," the old man said, "but she *is* his stepdaughter."

"Suppose the kid marries her?"

"They'll have a home here if I'm still alive, but he won't marry her. We'll have to think of something to get him out of the country till everybody forgets it. I can't go through with another fight, Joe. I just want to be let alone."

"We backed up tonight, boss," Joe said sourly. "Something I never done before. Now Bloom's gonna figger we're on the run and they'll start pushing."

"Funny how some men think they've got to have it all," the old man mused.

"I've got to kill Bloom, boss. Ain't no other way. With him gone, Cooney won't be so proddy."

"He's too fast for you, Joe."

"He'll get in the first shot," Joe agreed, "but I've got a notion how to fight him. Pull before he's ready. Make him nervous. If he misses his first one, I'll get him."

"Cooney always comes into town Monday morning," the old man said slowly. "Maybe we'd better get it over with if we've got to have it."

Tom paced slowly to the bunkhouse. He had an idea now what he'd done. Cooney and Bloom had been waiting for an excuse. He'd given it to them. There wasn't a man in the outfit who wouldn't cut off his right arm and give it to the old man if he wanted it. He wasn't well. Heart trouble, somebody had said.

The old man allowed he couldn't go through another fight. He'd had more than his share in the early days when he'd claimed the high desert range and started Bridlebit. Now Tom had fixed it so there would be a fight. Joe had backed up because of the old man's orders. Now the old man had given him the go-ahead sign.

It was Tom's fault. The whole business. For the first time he understood what Joe had tried to tell him. An outfit was a unit. No man had the right to put all into danger, any more than a soldier had the right to play the fool and lead his company into an ambush. It would have been different if it had been any of the others, but they still figured they had to look out for him.

SUNDAY was quiet until late afternoon. Then the word got around that they were going into town Monday to shoot hell out of BC. Everybody but the old man and Joe who had ridden off after dinner buckled on gunbelts and did a deal of shooting on the butte back of the house. Tom was the best of the lot. He could shoot the spots right off the ten of spades as far as he could see the card.

"If you'd ever learn to get your gun out of leather, kid," a buckaroo said, "you'd be a tough man to beat in a fight."

"He'd better stick to his fists," another put in, "or he'll get drilled full of holes before he pulls trigger."

That was just about what would happen in the morning, Tom thought. He'd known what he had to do ever since he'd heard the talk between Joe and the old man. The bottom had dropped out of his innards again and he felt the snakes crawling up his spine. He wondered if there was any feeling to it when a man died.

There wasn't much talk at breakfast. After they'd finished eating Joe said, "I want you to ride over to Slow Springs today. Get them bulls scattered out if they're bunched up again."

"Sure," Tom said as if he didn't suspect a thing.

Tom saddled up and rode around the butte as if he were headed for the springs. Then he touched up his horse and made a bee line for town. He didn't think there was any hurry. Likely Cooney and Bloom woudn't be there before ten or eleven, but he didn't take any chances.

It was a couple of minutes after ten when he rode his lathered horse into Saddle Rock and reined into the stable. "Bloom showed up this morning?" he asked the hostler.

"No, which same is a good thing for you. You'd be smart to stay out of his sight."

"He'll be smart to stay out of my sight," Tom said, big and brash, and headed down the street to the Powderhorn.

The Powderhorn catered to the BC hands the same as the Casino was Bridlebit's hangout. The barkeep stared in dumbfounded amazement when Tom shouldered through the batwings. "You're in the wrong stall, kid," he barked.

"Nope." He eased his gun in leather. "I'm waiting for Bloom."

"Have a drink?"

"Nope. Don't try to tip 'em off when they ride up, Moss Brain. I'm telling you."

It was audacity, as wild and crazy as the gall it had taken to ask Tildie Dawson to go to the dance. The barman didn't move, blinking owlishly at Tom, more scared than he let on.

They came, just a little after eleven, every BC hand who could fork a horse. They piled into the Powderhorn, fat Blaine Cooney in front, Arno Bloom behind him. There was a deal of laughing and loud talk that came from the tension that gripped them, although none would have admitted that smoking down the Bridlebit boys was anything more than a simple morning chore which had to be done.

"Kyle said they'd keep the kid at home," Bloom was saying, "but I aim to hang his hide—" Then he saw Tom.

Tom moved quickly along the bar to Cooney. "Stay out of this, Bloom. What I've got to say is to your boss." He pinned his gaze on Blaine Cooney's gross face. "Cooney, they tell me you got your start by working your wives to death. You ought to hang for it. You're a nickle-nurser, trying to grab what belongs to others. You've got no call to push Bridlebit. The only reason you're doing it is because you're a hog. I can't stop you if you're really aiming to fight, but one thing I can stop. That's doing to Tildie like you done to your wives. I'm gonna marry her. Now if you don't like the notion, Cooney, make your play."

NOBODY had talked to Blaine Cooney like that for years. Not since BC had grown into the biggest spread in the desert, not since he had the power and the money to take what he wanted. There had been a day when he'd had his share of hard courage, but that day was past. Now he had the money to hire his fighting done, but this was something that couldn't be passed to Arno Bloom or the others.

Cooney's lips grew white with the pressure he put upon them. He seemed to wilt under the hard, raking stare of the tall kid who stood before him. He took a shaky breath that sawed into the tight silence. He said, "You go ahead, Harker. Marry her if she'll have you."

"I've got a pretty good notion she'll have me, Cooney. Bloom, you want to hang my hide somewhere, do you? All right. I'm going over to the Casino." He looked at his watch. "It's eight minutes after eleven. At thirteen minutes after I'm coming out. If you've got any more guts than Cooney has, you'll come out a-smoking."

He pushed through them then, giving Bloom his back. The BC men made a path for him, respect showing on their hard-bitten faces, respect they'd never again hold for Blaine Cooney.

Tom waited in the Casino until his watch showed exactly 11:13. Then, with gun riding loosely in leather, he remembered how Joe Kyle had said he'd fight Bloom. That was exactly the way Tom played it. Before Bloom was in the street, when it was too far for straight shooting with a six for most men, Tom Harker made his draw.

It was slow, pathetically slow, but the gun was coming up. Surprised, Arno

Bloom jerked his Colt from its casing, a swift smooth draw as his draws always were. He fired, the shot slamming into the silence to be flung back until the prolonged echoes died between the false fronts. Another shot ripped into those echoes, the slug slapping into the wall behind Tom.

Arno Bloom had those two shots and missed. Whether it was the distance, or fear resulting from the cool effrontery Tom had shown or the memory of the beating he'd taken Saturday night was problematical. Tom wasted no time upon analysis. His gun was out of leather now and leveled and belching out its thunder, but Bloom did not die before Tom Harker's lead. It was enough to smash his right wrist. Then the left as Bloom stooped to retrieve his gun.

The BC bunch was riding out of town just as Joe Kyle and the old man led Bridlebit in. They pulled up in front of the Casino, not understanding until Bucky Wells, coming out of the barber shop, told them what he'd seen. "Afore that," Wells said, "he'd gone into the Powderhorn and curried Cooney down till there wasn't no hair left on his chest. Leastwise that's what the barkeep said."

Then Joe began to swear. "Look at that, boss," he breathed. "The crazy, lucky, hair-brained fool."

Tom had come out of the Cooney house, Tildie Dawson walking close to him, so many stars in her eyes that she couldn't see anything but the pug-nosed boy beside her. Tom, looking down at her, didn't see the Bridlebit hands until he was almost to them. Then he said. "We're going after our license. We'd sure admire to have you in the preacher's house to see us get hitched."

"We'll be there, Tom," the old man said. After they had gone on, he added, "You can let that boy row his own boat from here on in, Joe. You know, it'll be kind of nice to have her around. Been a long time since we've had a woman on Bridlebit."

"Yeah," Joe mused. "Boss, there's a couple of things I'd like to know. What did she do to make a ring-tailed roarer out of that kid?"

"What does any girl do to the man who loves her?" the old man asked. "What else do you want to know?"

"What kind of biscuits can that girl make?"

PASSING OF THE LOBO WOLF

Wild Life and the Cowboy

MY FATHER, who was a trail driver of the old days, was sent ahead of the herd one afternoon to select bedding grounds for the night. As he rode over one of the many billowing rises common to the Texas Panhandle, he saw a herd of about thirty buffalo charging up the opposite slope.

Then his eye caught something else closer at hand. In the bottom of the draw, near an almost dry waterhole, two lobo wolves were tearing ravenously at the still struggling form of a buffalo.

Whipping out his .45, Dad spurred his horse toward the grim drama of death. The huge wolves, busy with their meal, didn't see him until he was within a hundred yards of them. They raised their bulky heads, licked their gory chops, and snarled at the interruption. A slug or two from Dad's hogleg sent them slinking into the tall bunch-grass up the draw, looking back over their shoulders.

Dad quickly skinned out the hindquarters of the 700-pound buffalo and put this unexpected supper meat in the shade of a big clump of grass by the waterhole. He knew that the lobos would not return to man-scented meat.

The lobo, largest of North American wolves, weighed close to 100 pounds. His powerful shoulders were higher than his weak-looking hips, and his big, bulgy neck tapered up to his bony head and overdeveloped lower jaw. He stood as high as a big German police dog.

The lobo wolf was a plains animal. Unlike his pint-sized cousin, the coyote, which often has to resort to endurance running for his supper, the lobo depended on his spurting speed and bulldog power to pull down the lumbering but formidable buffalo.

With the killing off of the buffalo by the early robe-hunters, the lobo was doomed. He lacked the adaptability of others of the wolf tribe, which followed the game herds to the hills and mountains. When the pioneer settlers moved onto the plains with their cattle, the lobo changed his diet from buffalo to beef.

That meant war.

Today the once mighty lobo is almost extinct. He couldn't stand up against the bullets and traps and poison of the outraged frontier cattlemen. The coyote did and so did the timber wolf, but not the King of the Plains. Bone diggers of the future will undoubtedly reckon his remains with those of the dinosaur, saber-toothed tiger and woolly mammoth,, whose one-track resourcefulness led to oblivion.

——Jess Taylor

Massachusetts Street was a shambles, littered with bodies of dead and wounded

Guerrilla Raid

By R. T. Kingman

GUERRILLA chieftain William Quantrill had launched his successful raid against the completely unprepared town of Lawrence, Kansas. Almost every commercial building and many frame houses were in flames. A cloud hung over the city, and the heat from the scorching sun was almost unbearable.

All along the business section, Massachusetts Street was a shambles. The wooden sidewalks were reduced to glowing embers, and the bodies of more than a hundred dead or wounded men already littered the center of the street. The raiders, drunk with their loot from

The courage of the women was the shining star in the black night of Quantrill's raid

Lawrence saloons, would allow no one to approach the bodies, and many men died of their wounds only a few feet from their families.

Lawrence people soon found it was folly to talk back to the raiders. The first to try it in the downtown section were two gunsmiths, who argued when a gang of guer-

Women argued with raiders, giving husbands and sons time to escape

rillas set fire to their shop. The raiders dragged the two men to the door of the shop, lashed their wrists together, and then forced them into the burning building. The raiders sat in their saddles and watched the two men burn to death.

In the midst of this brutality, one virtue stood out—the raiders never harmed a woman. Perhaps they were afraid of reprisals; and perhaps Quantrill himself enforced the code, but at any rate they were strict about it. The woman were immune, and they used that immunity to good advantage.

All over the city young girls and old women argued with the raiders in their front yards, at their doorsteps, and in their parlors, giving their husbands and sons time to escape. Some saved their homes from fire, but many had to give way when the gangs from downtown came by. They could never reason or plead with the drunken ones; they could only stand by and watch their belongings go up in flames.

One of the most courageous women was the wife of Gen. Jim Lane, the famous Indian fighter. She knew her husband would be hunted, so she blocked the door with her body while he escaped to a corn field. Quantrill himself came up. He tipped his hat politely to Mrs. Lane.

"Please present my compliments to your husband," he said. "I'd looked forward to meeting him."

"My husband would have enjoyed it," she answered, "under different circumstances."

As Quantrill rode off, he passed within ten yards of a pair of sharp eyes that glared at him from under black brows. It was the general himself, and under his breath he cursed the city rule that had made him lock his pistols in the armory.

Mrs. Lane wasn't the only heroine. Another woman saved her house from seven different fires, and then was held back while another gang set fire to it all over again. The raiders waited until the flames burst out from a window, and then rode off. She ran inside, picked up a bundle of laundry, and leaped through the window, carrying the burning wood with her to the ground. After a few repairs, her house was as good as new.

One woman had a cellar in the middle of a growth of brush, and during the morning she directed 15 men to safety there. The raiders noticed that every man who ran by her disappeared, so they grabbed her and told her to divulge the hiding place. She admitted she had the cellar there, but added that anyone who entered would not come back alive. No one tried it.

AS THE raiders began to lose their confidence, resistance cropped up all over the city. The first man to strike back was Levi Gates, a farmer from outside Lawrence and one of the finest sharpshooters in the area.

He approached the city across Mount Oread. He saw at once that the raiders were in control, but he couldn't resist a shot—and on his first try he saw a guerrilla lurch in his saddle. One shot was all he got. A band of scouts beat him to death before he could re-load.

The Rankin brothers, John and Bill,

were army officers home on furlough. They were armed, and they soon found that the raiders were not anxious for gun battles. Six raiders cornered the brothers, but the pair shot their way out, wounding three and scaring off the others.

In his big stone house on the side of the hill, an old man locked his door and stood a few feet behind it. The raiders shouted from the front yard, "Come out or we'll drag you out!"

"Come on in if ye want to," the old man yelled back, "but I'll kill the first five men who come through that door."

The raiders moved on. They never found out that the old man had no gun.

Lack of firearms was a widespread disease that morning, so it was a time for miraculous escapes—that or be killed.

A young lieutenant, with a gang of guerrillas chasing him, ran into a Negro's shack on the edge of town. As the guerrillas approached they saw an old colored woman come out and shamble for the woods—but inside there was no lieutenant. In a few seconds, he had blackened his face, put on a dress, and made his escape.

A Union general used the same trick. When the raiders came upstairs, they found only a white-haired old lady, grumbling under her breath at the intrusion, so they left. The white hair was false, but the grumbling was not. The old general had sacrificed his luxuriant growth of whiskers for the disguise.

The Rankin brothers shot their way out of it, wounding three raiders

One woman received permission to carry her bedclothes from her burning house. The guerrillas watched her and three friends struggle out under an extremely heavy feather mattress. Wrapped up inside was her husband—and he stayed there all morning.

Another woman collaborated with her husband in a bit of acting that today would bring an Academy award. He ran outside, heard a ball whistle close by his head, and fell to the ground. His wife came to his side, and immediately began to wail that her husband was dead. The raiders laughed and rode on, leaving her husband very much alive.

Shortly after nine o'clock, Quantrill sent a party of 11 men to ride up Mount Oread to scout the surrounding country for signs of resistance. They were back immediately with their report. Riders were going from one farmhouse to another, and there was a big cloud of dust to the northeast.

That was enough for Quantrill. He rounded up his men. They responded with their usual efficiency, and within ten minutes he was leading them south out of town, bound for the Missouri Headquarters.

Even as he galloped down Massachusetts Street, the Lawrence-men were coming out of hiding, running for their guns. The first man at the armory was Gen. Lane. He broke down the door and grabbed his pistols. Within a half-hour he had rounded up a hundred armed riders, and they were on their way after Quantrill.

TEN MILES out of Lawrence, Quantril got his first real scare. The Lawrence vigilantes were in sight behind him, and to the north he heard the Union bugle call for the charge. He rearranged his forces with the pack horses in front and his fighting men in the rear, and brought his entire unit to a gallop just as three cavalry companies, under Major Plumb and Capt. Pike, rounded the curve of the hill.

As the two pursuing groups caught sight of each other, they rode on with increased confidence. Quantrill made another change.

He ordered his pack riders to slash the ropes which held their loot, and to spur all their mounts to the limit. The guerrillas pulled away.

Quantrill continued to put distance between himself and his pursuers, for his horses were still comparatively fresh. He had traveled slowly all the way to Lawrence, stopping now and then for food and water, and the horses had been used sparingly during the raid. On the other hand, the cavalrymen had just completed an all-night ride, and the Lawrence militia were poorly mounted. All their finest horses were up front with Quantrill.

Quantrill made it to his Lone Jack hide-out before nightfall. He had almost no loot, and more than 50 of his men were wounded. But he was satisfied. He had completed, with a large measure of success, one of the most daring raids in history. . . .

Back in Lawrence, the citizens were counting their losses. There were 140 dead, and eight more died before the next morning. Countless others had to be treated for serious wounds.

In the main part of town, not a building stood erect. Even the stone Eldridge House was a blackened shell. The city reeked of poisonous fumes and was dotted with glowing embers.

For a week, public burials were held for the victims, and ceremonies were conducted in honor of Pelathe and the other heroes who had saved the city from complete destruction. There was one name, however, that was conspicuously absent from the honor lists— that of Sallie Young.

Sallie Young, the 20-year-old girl who had risked her life to ride with Quantrill's raiders and plead for mercy for the town, was waiting to face a military tribunal on a charge of treason.

The people of Lawrence, frantically searching for someone upon whom to lay the blame for the attack, had picked Sallie. They knew that she was a comparative stranger in town, always a thing to arouse suspicion in that frontier community. Many of them had seen her riding with Quantrill during the raid, apparently on good terms. In their heart-broken confusion, they had accused her of treason.

There were some in town, however, who had heard Sallie plead with the guerrilla leader for their lives. They convinced their fellow townspeople of her innocence, and petitioned the prison commandant for her release. Sallie Young was never brought to trial. She returned to her uncle's home and took her rightful place, high in Lawrence society.

WILLIAM QUANTRILL the man remained a deep mystery. He was a person of changeable moods. He could shift from one side of an issue to the other overnight, and he had a magnetic personality that drew followers wherever he went. He was tall, slim, with dark skin, dark eyes, and coal-black hair that belied his New England parentage and made him appear a half-breed.

When he first came to Lawrence, he was called Charley Hart. He was a schoolteacher, a writer of symbolic poetry, and an avid believer in the abolition of slavery. He was affable, courteous, well liked.

Then there came a six-week period in his life that can never be explained. He left Lawrence, ostensibly to write poetry in some secluded shack. Something important must have happened to him during that absence, something that hurt him and turned his creative fervor into hate, for when he returned he was unmistakably a man of violence.

He had let his beard grow almost an inch. He began to talk on street corners and in saloons about the evils of slavery and his hatred of the South. He even organized a small party for a midnight raid on a slave-holder in Missouri. But when they arrived at the plantation, Quantrill's followers found he had sold them out to the slaver two weeks before. They were ambushed and killed.

Quantrill remained in Missouri, and rapidly became the most feared guerrilla leader in the West. Although he seldom killed, his genius for organization and planning made him the proxy murder of hundreds. The most famous outlaws of the era came to ride under his banner.

The Lawrence raid was his masterpiece. He worked on it for months, with the

Coming in the Next Issue

Robert Moore Williams'

Newest Novelette

Trigger a Desperate Gun

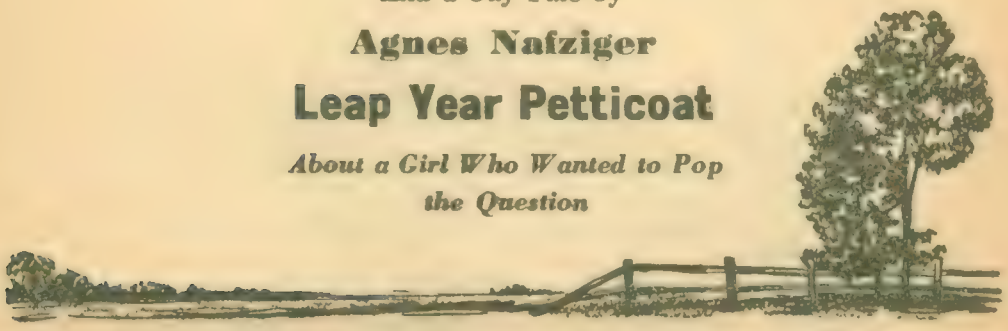
the Story of an Outlaw's Son
Who Led a Posse Down the Wrong Road

And a Gay Tale by

Agnes Nafziger

Leap Year Petticoat

About a Girl Who Wanted to Pop
the Question



thoroughness and foresight that is the peculiar property of a man of genius who guides his talents along destructive lines. He had his spies, who told him when to strike, and when the city would be helpless, and when the Union Army camps would probably be slowest to act. And he had his men, the most ruthless and efficient killers of that time.

To Quantrill, the raid was a success. It meant great prestige for the Southern cause, and it pointed up the inefficiency of the Union Army. He said later that he would have wiped out the entire town except for one thing—the courage of the women.

"The men of Lawrence were cowards," he said, "but the women had more outright courage than any rider I ever led."

Lawrence was now a defended city. The Army returned to the outskirts, and the town militia was one of the finest in the nation. But after Quantrill's raid there was no violence.

That winter was a hard one. There was a shortage of food, shelter and clothing, but the work of reconstruction went on. The advertisement of a Lawrence saddle shop read: "Established in 1855, stood the drought of 1860, totally destroyed by Quantrill in 1863, defies all competition in 1864."

Today, Lawrence is a quiet city, with broad avenues and high-arched shade trees. On Mount Oread, where Quantrill's scouts scanned the horizon for the approaching cavalry, stands the University of Kansas, three times bigger than the old city itself. The street where George Todd led his first wild charge is now flanked with fraternity houses. A four-lane super highway covers the trail that Pelathe traveled in his all-night ride.

But the city still remembers. Old stone buildings still bear scars from guerrilla pistol ball. The city cemetery, with its nearly 150 honored graves, remains a spot for sightseeing. In the vault of the mammoth university library are scores of old mementoes and yellowed manuscripts, imperishable records of the Quantrill raid.

From these eyewitness accounts comes the story you have just read. Every word is true—just as those writers saw it on that August morning in 1863, when they sat up in their beds and found themselves at the mercy of the most ruthless guerrilla of the Old West.

(This is the last of two articles on William Quantrill, the Civil War guerrilla.)

STINKER

By Elsa Barker

She gave a little gasp. "Oh. I'm sorry, Steve. Are you hurt?"

STEVE claimed he didn't go for blondes, and he carried his indifference so far that it took a skunk to teach him good manners

NOBODY would ever have expected a man like Steve Donegan to notice a quiet little kid like the Crowley girl. Steve liked big girls, lively and sassy-tongued—popular girls like dark-eyed Lucy Malette, or red-headed Kitty Farmer. At least he thought he did. But although plenty of them knew how to throw a mighty neat loop at a man, Steve was rope-wise, and none had ever come close to snaring him.

Steve had worked for the Rafter C five years, the summer that Hazel Crowley came to make her home with her uncle. For a while that summer it had looked like he and Spike Logan, the other Rafter C hand, were going to have to start hunting new jobs, for old Walt Crowley, like many other cattleman, had expanded wide and easy on borrowed money when times were good, and now for some months the Los Hitos City bank had been on the verge of going in the cattle business.

Then had come this letter from Walt Crowley's brother Tom, in Chicago. Tom wasn't getting any younger, he wrote; his health wasn't so good. The doctor had advised him to quit his desk job and head for the country, preferably some spot in the high, dry West. He recalled the visit he and his daughter Hazel, had made to the ranch some years ago with pleasure. Now he had a few thousand dollars saved up, and if Walt would be interested, he'd like to throw it into the ranch on some sort of a partnership basis. To Walt Crowley, and his wife, Molly, it was like manna from heaven.

The boys were just riding in from work on a late Saturday afternoon when the buckboard rode in from Los Hitos with the new arrivals. Spike Logan took one look and dived for the bunkhouse wash pan and a clean shirt, swearing under his breath because nobody had reminded him that skinny little girls with freckles and pig tails do grow up.

Steve Donegan didn't run. He stepped forward and greeted the newcomers, gave the girl one look of casual interest, then said to old Walt: "I'll take care of the team."

Even sweat-grimed and dusty as he was after a day in the branding corral, Steve Donegan was quite a hunk of cowboy, and the girl's eyes widened as she watched him.

But the interest was one-sided. Hazel Crowley was one of those quiet little medium blonde girls. Steve hadn't looked long enough to see that the dark-lashed grey eyes had a sparkle of humor in them, that her wide mouth was made just right for smiling, and that her nose had just enough of a saucy tilt to be cute as a six-weeks-old kitten.

Now her grey eyes had a sort of a bedazzled look in them as she went into the house. She came out again before long and headed like a homing pigeon for the corral where Steve was gentling a three-year-old colt. He didn't even turn his head when she climbed up on the fence to watch.

The colt was the pick of the crop, dark brown, with slim legs, a small head, wide between the eyes with delicate, flaring nostrils. Brought in off the range only a week before, he was still wary and edgy, but he

was smart too. He had learned that it didn't pay to fight back when there was a rope on his neck. He even seemed to sort of understand that the cowboy wasn't going to hurt him.

Steve ran his hand down the colt's back, and spoke to him softly. The hand slid back over the sleek hip. The colt quivered and sidled away from him.

Outside the corral a gentle, young milk cow came ambling curiously over. She stretched up a wet, pink nose and sniffed windily at the seat of the spanking new levis perched on the fence.

Hazel Crowley, unused to such goings on, jumped and gave a squeal of fright.

The brown colt spooked at the sound, reared and lunged away from Steve Donegan's hand. One hoof lashed out as he turned, missing the cowboy by scant inches.

Steve turned and looked hard at the girl. "If you aim to watch," he said sharply, "try an' keep still!"

Color flooded the girl's face. "I'm sorry," she said. "I won't do it again."

Steve turned back to the colt. Most of the girls he knew would either have sassed him right back, or they'd have jumped down and gone to the house in a huff. Steve wasn't usually a mean-talking hombre, and when this girl just sat there quietly, looking like a spanked pup, he began to feel ashamed of himself.

But he didn't say anything more, and she didn't either while he quieted the colt again.

The kitchen door opened and Molly Crowley called: "Supper in five minutes, Steve. Hurry and get washed!"

Steve waved to show he'd heard. He gave the colt a couple of pats on the neck, then took the rope off, and dumped oats in his feed box. When he turned again, the girl was gone from the fence, and young Spike Logan, clean-shirted, his black hair still shiny from recent water dousing, was joining her at the kitchen door.

MRS. CROWLEY was plump, good-natured and talkative. Tonight, in her pleasure at having another woman around to listen, she fairly outdid herself. There wasn't much that Hazel Crowley and her father didn't learn about the Rafter C and its hands in those forty-five minutes at the supper table.

She told them all about the drouth that had plagued the range for the past years; how sometimes the well even went dry and there wasn't enough water for the garden; that a skunk had lately been getting into her chicken house, killing the young fryers and sucking eggs; and there was some mighty pretty country within horseback riding distance of the ranch that maybe Steve or Spike would show Hazel someday; and how was Chicago?

The only time anybody had time for more than a couple of words slid in edgewise, was when she got up to replenish the biscuit plate.

Spike Logan had been screwing up his courage for this chance, "Miss Crowley—I'll run in a nice gentle horse for you to ride in the morning. I—I wondered if maybe you'd—you'd like to take a ride—maybe up to the Sulphur Spring Draw. It's mighty pretty up there this time of year."

The girl didn't answer right away. For a second her eyes seemed to swerve over in Steve Donegan's direction, then back again to Spike. She smiled.

"I'd love it," she said. "And the horse won't have to be so awful gentle. I've ridden some."

Molly Crowley was back now with the biscuits. She picked up the talk where she had dropped it only a couple of minutes before.

"The Mallettes are giving a barbecue supper and dance next Saturday night, Hazel. They've built an outdoor pavilion, and are hiring a Mexican string band from Los Hitos. Lucy called me this morning and told me about it. Seems as if it's going to be a mighty big affair, and said for all of us to come."

Spike Logan took a deep breath and spoke up quick: "I'd like mighty well to take you to that, Miss Hazel—if you'll let me."

This time there was no doubt about the way the girl hesitated, and even Spike Logan saw her eyes swing around to Steve. It was plain that she was more than willing

to distribute her favors, if she was given half a chance.

When Steve didn't say anything, but calmly reached for another biscuit, her cheeks got a little pink.

"I'd like that very much," she said to Spike, trying to smile, but her voice sounded flat.

Steve Donegan began to have that queer little feeling of shame again, not wholly unmixed with anger. He didn't want to tromp all over the damned girl's feelings. To cover it a little he grinned at her across the table.

"Save me a waltz," he said.

She smiled at him, and it seemed to light a candle behind the grey eyes. Steve suddenly realized that she was pretty.

AFTER supper Hazel and her Aunt Molly went into the kitchen to wash the dishes. Spike Logan hovered around the door for a minute, as if debating whether a cowboy would lose caste by lending a hand at woman's work. Things had come to a bad enough state when cowhands did the milking. He followed Steve out to the front porch, where he cornered him.

Spike was an earnest, round-faced young cowboy, without much humor in him. He had a quiet way of talking that sometimes fooled folks into thinking he was shy. Now he caught Steve's arm as he started for the front steps.

"Steve, I—I've sorta fallen for that little gal inside."

"Whyn't you tell her, then, instead of me?"

"Well, I didn't want to spook her by speakin' up too soon," Spike explained earnestly. "An' if you ain't got no such idea yourself, I'd sure appreciate it if you'd just sort of step back an' give me free hand."

"Hell," Steve grunted. "I ain't settin' on your shirt-tail!"

Spike kept his hold on his arm. "I know it," he insisted soberly. "But you know how it is with women. It'd make it a heap easier for me if you'd just pretend you ain't interested."

Steve shrugged, then laughed. "Hell. I wouldn't have to pretend!" he said. "I never did take much to that little kitten-faced kind. I like girls with a little zip and gumption!"

From the dark hall behind him came the soft sound of a gasp, then a quick, light footstep moving away fast. Steve turned and stared into the darkness, seeing nothing, while a cold hunch grabbed at the pit of his stomach. He started to follow through the hall, then turned back with another shrug.

"Well," he said dryly to Spike, "that sure ought to fix things up just dandy for you."

Steve was up before any of the rest of the household was stirring the next morning. He ate a cold snack in the kitchen, then took himself off to a distant corner of the range on a windmill repairing job that had needed doing for a long time. It took him several hours for he didn't hurry at it. When he had finished, he ate a couple of cold biscuit sandwiches. Then, since it was Sunday, he stretched out in the shade of the one willow clump on the bank of the water tank, using his saddle blanket for a pillow.

Ordinarily he would have been asleep in five minutes, but today there was some strange restlessness gnawing at his gizzard. He wondered if maybe it wasn't about time for him to be looking for a new range. He had been with the Rafter C for a long time, but before that he had worked for a dozen different outfits in about that many months.

He sat up and smoked a couple of cigarettes, but they didn't help much. Maybe he had the pip. Finally he got on his horse again. Instead of heading for home, he bent around by the Mallette ranch.

As was usual on a Sunday afternoon there were a couple of saddled horses tied to the hitch racks, dozing under the shade of big cottonwoods, but there was a special welcome in Lucy Mallette's dark eyes for Steve Donegan anyhow.

She was a big girl, breezy-tongued and pleasant, with a gift for making folks feel comfortable around her. She played the piano a little, sang a little, not too fancy for a cowboy's taste.

USUALLY going into the Mallette house was as comfortable as putting on a well worn glove, but today the strange restless feeling kept a-hold of Steve, and after a few minutes discussing the weather with her two other callers, he got up to go again.

Lucy Mallette went to the front door with him. "What's the matter, Steve?" she asked him.

"Nothin'," he said, then shrugged. "Maybe I'm gettin' an itching foot again."

She gave him a quick, sharp look. "Spike Logan was by here a little while ago," she said. "He brought the Crowley girl with him. She's pretty, isn't she?"

Steve left off twirling his hat over his forefinger. "Is she?" he said in surprise.

Lucy Mallette laughed. She batted the big dark eyes at him. "Don't you ever really look at any of us, Steve?" she asked.

That got the result she had intended. Steve looked at her and grinned, then put a finger under her chin, stooped and kissed her lightly.

"See you Saturday night," he said easily.

He squinted at the sky, saw that it was not more than an hour until sundown, and kicked his pony into an easy little jog trot. Even now instead of heading home, the restlessness that was in him made him take another detour up into the foothills, so that it was long after dark when he finally reached the ranchhouse, and the lights were out in the kitchen.

Inside the corral the brown colt nickered to him. Steve spoke to him. "Hi, there, Chapo!"

He kicked a boot free and started to step out of the saddle. From the shadows of the barn a slim figure in a white dress moved suddenly.

"Is that you, Steve?"

Steve's pony snorted and shied suddenly. Already half out of the saddle, the cowboy went the rest of the way in a hurry. He sat down on the hard-packed clay with a grunt.

From the girl came a dismayed little gasp. "Oh! I—I—Steve, I'm sorry. Are you hurt?"

The cowboy got to his feet, dusting the seat of his pants. "Look—" he began sharply, then stopped.

The girl seemed to have an idea about what he'd started to say. "I'm sorry," she said, with real distress. "I—I heard the chickens cackling, and I thought maybe some varmint was after them and maybe I could scare him away. Then I—I just stopped to talk to Chapo a minute. I—I didn't mean to scare your horse. Have you had supper, Steve? Aunt Molly's gone to bed, but I can fix you up something if you're hungry."

The ridiculous fall he had taken, added to the strange restlessness that had been roiling around in him all day, suddenly bubbled up to a boil.

"I can fix my own supper," he said shortly. "But what you *can* do for me is try to learn to keep out from under foot!"

Some girls Steve Donegan knew could have laughed that off. Others would have sassed him back. This one did neither. There was enough moonlight for him to see the slim shoulders stiffen. And he was near enough to hear the light indrawn catch of breath.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly. "I didn't mean to be a pest."

She turned and went toward the house in a hurry. Steve unsaddled his horse. He felt like swearing, and did—at himself—and then at this shy, big-eyed girl who seemed to be getting in his hair, and finally at the world in general.

STEVE halfway expected to be called into the office the next morning and given his time, but apparently Hazel Crowley wasn't a tattletale. At breakfast every one seemed about as usual. Maybe the girl's grey eyes didn't have quite the same dewy, dazed look in them they'd had the day before, but Steve Donegan didn't have much chance to know about that because she kept them pretty much turned in Spike Logan's direction. Her low laugh seemed to bubble out a little oftener than Spike's laborious wisecracks would have called for. It was a nice sound, but somehow it made big Steve Donegan feel lower than a snake's belly.

After breakfast he managed to catch the

girl for a moment by the dining room door after the others had gone out.

With a feeling of embarrassment that was somehow new to him, he twirled his hat over a forefinger. "I'm sorry about last night," he said.

For a moment the girl just looked at him without speaking. Then she shrugged. "You won't be bothered again," she said, and turned and walked away.

Steve didn't feel any better. He didn't feel any better all that week. True to her promise, the girl kept out of his way, but with a strange inconsistency he found himself missing her quiet presence on the corral fence. After a time he even got to resenting the easy way the older Crowleys had dropped into the habit of saying "Spike and Hazel"—like butter and eggs, or peaches and cream.

He knew that the girl had made friends with the brown Chapo horse and went out to the horse pasture daily to pet him, but she never let him catch her there. When she rode, it was always to some other part of the range than where Steve Donegan was working—and usually it was with Spike Logan.

Steve went about his work as usual, trying to drop back into the old carefree routine. But there was that mixture of feelings roiling around inside him all the time, like a pot of mush coming to a slow boil. For Steve this was a new feeling. He was not used to feeling this way and he did not like it one bit. Two evenings that week he rode over to see Lucy Mallette. He liked Lucy, and she made no bones about being glad to see him, but each time he rode home feeling more restless than ever. He toyed again with the idea that maybe it was time for him to move on to a new range, but somehow he didn't get around to doing anything about it.

CUPID'S PARADOX

By PHIL SQUIRES

"Them arrows of Cupid's," says Idaho Red,
"They're sharp as a cactus an' fast as hot lead!
They'll knock a pair off in a romantic bog
As quick as a pitchfork can puncture a frog!
An' yet all the hurtin' they cause him an' her
Is a feelin' that's soft as a cottontail's fur!"

IN A WAY it was the brown colt and a small black and white striped animal with a bushy tail that finally settled things for him.

On Saturday afternoon Steve brought the brown colt in to the big corral and saddled him for the first time. He led him around for a few turns, then smoked a cigarette while he waited for the hump to soak out of his back. Steve had ridden plenty of hard buckers in his time, and still could if he had to, but he had gotten over thinking it was fun. Besides this colt was nice-dispositioned, and smart. Too kind an animal to risk spoiling by rough handling.

Old Walt Crowley and Spike Logan were just riding in from the day's work. They reined up close to the corral to watch. As if they had seen what was up from the kitchen window, Hazel and her aunt came out to stand on the back step.

Spike Logan grinned. "What you waitin' on, Steve?" he called loudly. "Want somebody to top him off for you?"

Steve didn't figure that one needed answering. Spike was the kind who was addicted to big talk when there were womenfolks around. He wooled the colt's mane a little, gathered the reins over his neck, and stepped into the saddle.

For a moment Chapo stood as if he were trying to figure this thing out. Then he snorted, shook his head once, and gathered powerful muscles under him. The corral was big, and the colt was like greased lightning turning on a dime. For a few minutes he took the cowboy for a wild merry-go-round ride, round and round the corral, but without ever really bucking. Finally Steve pulled him up.

On the other side of the fence Walt Crowley was grinning approvingly. "If he's smart as he is fast, he's shore goin' to make a nice hoss."

"Hell, I thought we was goin' to see some rodeoin'," said Spike. "Whyn't you thumb him a little, Steve?"

Steve didn't answer that one either. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Spike throw a glance at the watching women. Then suddenly Spike took off his big hat and sailed it into the corral.

"Yippee!" he squalled. "Ride 'im, cowboy!"

This time, for about ten jumps, the startled brown colt showed what he could do if he really took a notion, but when he stopped, trembling and roller-nosed, Steve was still in the saddle.

Swearing a little under his breath, he stepped to the ground. He was mad enough to punch Spike's big nose, but he was trying hard to keep a lid on his temper.

Outside the corral, Walt Crowley and Spike were having their hands full trying to quiet their own broncs, excited by the rumpus. Suddenly, as the sorrel hip of Spike's horse swung around close to the fence, Steve stuck an arm through and quickly thumbed the bronc sharply in the flank.

Old Walt Crowley's grizzled face broke into a grin. "Ride 'im, cowboy!" he shouted gleefully.

Spike was a fair rider, but he wasn't anywhere near as good as he thought he was. Caught by surprise, he lasted only to the third jump before he fell crashing against the fence.

For a stunned moment he lay still, and Steve heard one of the women give a little squeak of fright as both of them started running toward the corral. Then Spike stirred and got to his feet. The grin came back to Walt Crowley's face as he rode off after Spike's still bucking bronc. Steve began unconcernedly unsaddling the brown colt.

Molly Crowley's angry face looked at him over the fence. "Steve Donegan, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Two grown men actin' like a couple of mean little boys!"

"Yes, ma'am!" Steve said meekly. For a moment his eyes met Hazel's puzzled, half-angry grey ones, then Spike Logan groaned again and the girl moved quickly to his side.

"Your leg isn't broken, is it, Spike?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, I don't think so," Spike groaned, "but it's wrenched somethin' terrible! If you girls would help me a bit, I reckon I could make it to the house under my own power!"

WITH a woman's shoulder under each arm, Spike managed to hobble, groaning with every step, across the yard to the house.

Steve rubbed down the brown colt, gave him a feed of oats, then lead him back to the pasture. When he went to the house for the bucket to do Spike's milking chore for him, Mrs. Crowley met him at the back door. She was still mad, but her anger had shifted direction.

"That great big fourflushin' lummox!" she said indignantly. "He's makin' Hazel fetch and carry for him like he was a two-months-old baby!"

She put her hands on her hips, cocked her head sideways and eyed Steve speculatively. "Steve, that girl's been countin' all week on goin' to the barbecue and dance tonight. Since Spike's too banged up to go, whyn't you take her?"

"Sure," said Steve heartily. "Glad to."

"No thanks," said a cool voice from the other side of the kitchen.

Mrs. Crowley turned. "Now, Hazel," she chided. "You—"

"Now, Aunt Molly," the girl interrupted firmly. "I mean it!"

She turned on her heel and headed for the front of the house. Steve set the milk bucket down and followed. She wasn't moving very fast because she let him catch her at the foot of the stairs. He stepped in front of her so that he could see her face.

"Look, Hazel," he said soberly. "I'd *like* to take you to the dance! I'd have asked you even if Aunt Molly hadn't suggested it!"

She turned slowly. The dewy, bedazzled look was gone from her eyes, but they still held a look of puzzlement—and maybe just a hint of anger or plain dislike.

"*I* don't want to go with *you*," she said clearly.

Steve Donegan swallowed. He wasn't used to having to beg favors from girls. His pride was riding him hard, but he clamped a savage lid on it, and forced patience into his voice.

"I told you the other day that I was sorry for the way I'd acted and talked. I admit I was wrong. Now—can't we bury the hatchet, an' be friends?"

HER LIPS smiled, but her eyes stayed the same. "I don't see why not."

He held out his hand and she took it briefly, then drew away. "Now will you go to the dance with me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

From one of the upstairs bedrooms Steve heard a low but not too well muffled groan.

The girl half turned away from him. "Why—why I'm going to stay home and read poetry to poor Spike. I have a lovely new book of Keats' sonnets. I think he'll like that."

Steve thought there was a hint of a smile dimpling one cheek as she turned away, but he couldn't be sure.

Out in the kitchen Molly Crowley took one look at his set face and handed him the milk bucket without speaking. Out in the yard he met Walt Crowley coming to the house. Steve stopped, reached out the bucket and hooked it over the old man's arm. Crowley looked down at it uncomprehendingly.

"What's this for?"

"I'm leaving," Steve told him calmly. "Pronto! As soon as I can get my duds picked up."

Walt Crowley scratched his grizzled hair and frowned. "The women folks been ridin' you about that little fracas awhile ago?"

"It ain't that. My foot's been itchin' for quite a spell. Maybe I'll have a fling at the rodeo game."

For a moment the old man didn't speak, then he said reluctantly: "I sure hate this, Steve. You seem mighty nigh like one of the family."

Steve was hating it too. For a moment he was almost sorry he had been so hasty. Walt Crowly sighed.

"All right," he said. "I'll go to the house an' make out your check, while you pack up." He turned to go, then stopped. "An' by the way—as long as you're goin'—you might as well take that brown colt with you."

Steve stared at him, then swallowed. "But Walt—I—"

"I meant for you to have him all the time," the old man said calmly. "An in

case you wake up Monday mornin' feelin' headachy an' lonesome—with all your money spent—why come on back."

Steve swallowed again, then cleared his throat. "Thanks, Walt. Hell—thanks!"

PACKING up to leave the Rafter C after five good years, Steve discovered hadn't relieved the restless, churning feeling that had been aching his gizzard for a week. But once he had taken the bit in his teeth pride wouldn't let him back out.

Riding the brown colt, and leading the tall, neat-limbed *grullo* he had owned for ten years, Steve came around the corner of the corral at a trot. His good-bys already said to Molly and Walt Crowley, there was nothing more to stop him, but he slowed the colt into a walk anyway.

As if maybe she had been waiting for this chance, Hazel Crowley came out the back door with an egg basket hung on her arm and started for the chicken yard.

Steve nodded to her, and would have ridden on past, but she called to him anxiously. "Steve! Wait a minute!"

He pulled up the brown colt, then obeying some inner compulsion that was stronger than his own will, stepped out of the saddle. The girl's face was full of distress as she took a step toward him.

"Steve—please don't—"

At that moment a small black and white striped animal with a bushy tail ambled out of the chicken house. He swung an inquisitive, pointed little nose toward the girl, not more than a dozen feet away, and stopped. He turned his head, saw the cowboy a dozen feet in the other direction.

Steve's hand dropped to the gun at his hip, then eased away again as he estimated the distance, and realized that close as the girl was, she was sure to get perfumed up good if he shot.

"Stand still!" he cautioned her in a low voice. "Don't spook him!"

For a frozen moment it seemed the girl was going to obey. Then her grey eyes narrowed calculatingly. With a movement swift as a cat pouncing on a mouse she stooped and picked up a rock. The skunk's bright little eyes were on her. He turned, and his tail rose threateningly.

"Don't do it!" Steve said sharply. "For gosh sakes, Hazel—"

The girl's arm drew back and threw the rock. At the same time she screamed and dived for the chicken house. The rock landed a little to one side and behind the animal. He whirled at the thud behind him, tail up.

The brown colt spooked at the girl's scream, his sudden yank on the reins pulling Steve off-balance, as his hand dived for the gun at his hip again. The next instant the colt's rump swung around, hit his shoulder and sent him sprawling to the ground as his finger squeezed the trigger. His aim was poor, the little skunk's practically perfect.

THE AIR in the bunkhouse was thick with the acrid, awful odor of burning clothes liberally sprinkled with skunk musk. Steve flung open the window as he pulled on clean underwear, shirt and pants. The odor hung everywhere, thick and sickening, outside as well as in.

There was a gentle knock on the door Steve ignored it. A voice called softly: "Steve!"

"Go away!" he said crossly. "I'm taking a bath!"

"You're not either!" The girl's voice sounded spunky and determined. "I saw you throw the bath water out the back door a half-hour ago. Aunt Molly sent you over some supper. Now quit sulking and come out and eat it!"

Steve Donegan began to grin. It occurred to him suddenly that now maybe he knew the reason for all his restless discontent of the past week. He had done a lot of sidestepping from some pretty neat lady-loops thrown at him since he'd been working on the Rafter C, but there wasn't much use of a man fighting his head any longer once the noose was over his head.

He swung the door open.

Hazel Crowley set the tray down on the step and backed away in a hurry with her hand to her nose.

"Gosh, it's awful isn't it? I wonder why Burbank never thought of crossing them with violets or roses! He'd have really had something!"

She sat down on a big rock a few feet

away, and even in the swiftly gathering dusk Steve could see the wide grey eyes studying him speculatively. "I suppose it wouldn't do any good to say I'm sorry."

"Not a bit," Steve said cheerfully. He picked up a cup of coffee and cuddled it thoughtfully in his big hands. "You did it on purpose, didn't you?"

For a moment she didn't answer, then she said slowly: "Well, I didn't plan on the skunk being there, if that's what you mean."

"It ain't. Did you aim to hit him, or was the near miss just good luck for you?"

She flexed the muscles of her right arm a little. "Well," she said mildly, "I was pitcher for a girl's softball team in Chicago for a couple of years."

Steve Donegan laughed. The girl started to smile back at him then sobered.

"Aunt Molly and Uncle Walt felt awful bad about you leaving, and I knew you had your back up so that nothing we could say would persuade you to stay. But I didn't think you'd want to ride off smelling bad. I thought maybe if I could sort of get you quarantined away from other folks for a few days—maybe we could talk you into staying—all of us, I mean."

Steve Donegan felt good, but for the first time in his self-confident young life, he also felt wary, and it was suddenly the most important thing in the world to him that he shouldn't hurt or anger this girl again.

"How's Spike?" That wasn't what he wanted to say, but the words were out before he thought.

"Maybe I'd better go see." But she stayed where she was.

With the odor of skunk still hanging heavy about him, Steve didn't move any closer, but he reached out a hand to her, and after a moment she put her small, soft palm in it.

"Stay an' talk to me," begged Steve softly. "I've got an awful lot to learn about you."

She looked at him, and the faint beginnings of a smile put dimples in both round cheeks.

"You won't if you go away," she reminded him.

"That's right," Steve said.

It was too dark to see for sure now, but Steve was almost certain that the starry, bedazzled look was back in the grey eyes. This time he aimed to see that it stayed there. He squeezed her hand.

"Stinker!" said the girl. But her small hand returned the squeeze.

TEXAS HOG HEAVEN

IT'S AN OLD western tradition that sheep and cattle don't mix, but in the lush, wet, timbered river bottoms of the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers in southeast Texas, hogs and cattle ramble the same unfenced range, owned and worked by the same ranchmen owners, without conflict. Houston is the Lone Star State's biggest city, and Beaumont, 87 miles away, is certainly no village. Yet in the swampy, junglelike country of Liberty County, almost right between them, is a great big patch of the wildest wilderness ever prowled by a ringtailed coon. And it is practically plumb full of cattle and hogs, both running loose.

These are no razorbacks, but fairly well bred porkies of many mixed breeds. Some ranchmen own as many as 5,000 of them, which they "brand" with an ear mark and turn loose to hustle for themselves. Feeding on the acorns of four or five different kinds of oaks, on muscadines, crayfish and wild mulberries, these piggies put on plenty of fat, and from around December on till late spring their owners have a high old time rounding them up for market.

Trained dogs locate bunches of hogs numbering from a dozen to four dozen, bay them, and at the sound of the dogs' barking, the mounted hog hunters come a-ridin' to help the dogs chouse them to the pens. Mostly they are driven in, but often some semi-wild boar puts up a fight and has to be roped, hog-tied and hauled in on a sled drawn by mules—or even shot and butchered on the spot.

Half-wild hogs can be vicious fighters, and many a dog gets himself badly ripped up in chousing them. Even horses get their legs slashed sometimes, and a man on foot can, and sometimes does, get seriously hurt. But not often, for just as the old-time Texas cowboy savvied handling longhorn cattle, so these modern combination "cow-and-hog-boys" savvy rounding up hogs.

The hog hunters ride small horses, which can make their way through the tangle of brush and vines better than bigger ones could. But without their well trained "hog-hounds" the job of rounding up these peppery, pastoral pigs would be impossible.

——S. Omar Barker

THE PEOPLE of Mexico stirred beneath a yoke of tyranny, and Dean joined them to ride behind Pancho Villa against the proud family of the girl in his heart

Embattled Valley

BY CLEE WOODS

FOUR *arrieros* were halting their mules in the high pass of the Sierra Madre Mountains. The bellmare came to a standstill up front and looked back at the pack train of nine mules, as if she shared the apprehension of the muleteers.

Dean McDougal pushed forward on his chestnut sorrel. If the pack train halted more than a moment some of the mules would lie down, then they could be gotten up only by unloading and repacking. It was near camping time, but Dean had to crowd on. This supply of grain, grub and guns had to reach his El Maltillo ranch down in Valle Verde by tomorrow night.

In deep voice Dean asked Bartolo, muleteer corporal, "What is it?"

Bartolo was a dark-skinned little man with a heavy scar across his left cheek. In Spanish he answered Dean. "Tracks. They come up the other trail, and now go ahead of us. The mules have been pricking their ears forward too much the last two kilometers."

Dean shot glances ahead, then at the piney denseness of the woods on each side of the pass. Rangy, lean, with curly red hair and a fair skin tanned only a shade lighter than Bartolo's, he wore a brown Stetson, and brush-clawed grey shirt.

Dean had been sharing the tension of muleteers and mules, as if he had felt invisible eyes on him all these six days. At the trail forks he looked down at the fresh tracks. Shod horses! In this wild mountain pass of Mexico shod horses other than Dean's own meant only one thing. *Los rurales,* of the federalized police force of Mexico. *Los rurales* could be intensely partisan when so directed, and this would be such a time.

Bartolo said, *"Y mire!"*

He was pointing at a sprig of violets on the ground. The faded flowers were tied with small yellow ribbon. If Señorita Carolina Roybal had written her name in the dust she hardly could have proclaimed more plainly that she had passed this way. She'd worn an orchid when she attended the court hearing only a few days ago down in Chihuahua City. She'd been wearing some kind of flower or spray every time he'd laid eyes on her.

Bartolo suggested, *"Los rurales,* they are guarding the girl and the Roybal party."

Dean added, "Yes, but they want to

hurry me and my dad out of Valle Verde, too."

All four *arrieros* looked at him sharply, as if to ask, "Turning back?"

Dean said, "Let's go," and spurred his chestnut Brasa horse on up the trail ahead of his pack train.

He had gone only a short distance, however, when Brasa threw ears forward again. This time Dean saw a man, coming toward him on the run. Dean knew from his small size and the smooth rhythm of his pace that it was an Indian runner from Tarahumare in the wildest mountains in Mexico.

The Tarahumare slowed up a little, as if to make positive identification of Dean's party. Then he broke forward in a swifter pace. He wore nothing but a breechcloth and a red band about his head. Soon Dean recognized the runner as Teeno, fastest man of the Tarahumare village that lay back in the mountains miles to the east.

Teeno came up and halted beside Dean. For all his long run, his breath came easily.

He said to Dean in Tarahumare, "My friend." Dean returned the greeting with, "My friend Teeno."

Then Dean handed Teeno a cigarette and match, and the Tarahumare lit it slowly. Teeno blew smoke out and sucked again at his cigarette. At last he said, "It is bad."

Dean cupped hands on his own match and got cigarette going. Then he fastened penetrating blue eyes on the Tarahumare. He understood that an Indian must deliver an important message slowly and with ceremony. In Dean's own veins there throbbed some Indian blood. One-eighth of him came from that little remnant of strange blond Indians living in the wildest part of the Yaqui mountain stronghold—a people among whom fair skin and hair cropped out enough to build up the legend of "white Indians."

Teeno knew he must out with it. He said, "Your father has just killed two men. Vaqueros they were, of the hacienda. One of your Yaquis asked me to hurry ahead and find you."

Something chilled away down deep inside Dean. He'd been afraid of this. The Vaqueros of Don Andreo Roybal had aggravated his father of late until anything could happen. And now it had.

"Did they say how it happened?" Dean asked Teeno.

"They shot at him first. Your father said it was so. From behind rocks. He ran his horse for them. He shot them."

Dean hipped about in his huge-horned Mexican saddle and said, "Bartolo, fetch the pack train on. But avoid the Roybal party like poison."

The Tarahumare held onto Dean's big, batwing chaparejos. "They are not far ahead," he said. "They will make camp tonight in Los Anchos. They leave two

"Captain Diego is attacking right

guards behind, watching out for you."

Dean said, "I'll have to beat them through the Narrows."

Teeno said, "You have friends. Many. They hunt the mountains," and he motioned off toward the most rugged part of the high mountains.

"Who?" Dean asked.

"Los Yaquis."

Dean didn't like that news. The Yaqui Indians belonged to the westward, not in here. Why were they on the prowl? Dean felt within himself a growing sense of unrest as he rode on. Mexico's sickness, the seething of the masses under tyranny was creeping even back into this little world that had lain dormant through all the other convulsions of the nation.

THE MOUNTAIN range was so rough and rock-ribbed that it was impossible to get around the party ahead. Teeno might have made it around them afoot, but Dean had to have a horse for the fast ride on to his father. He decided that he'd have to risk overtaking the party and passing them openly. Teeno left him and took to the mountainside.

When he came up near the two waiting guards he saw that they wore the black shirts of *los rurales* and each had on a badge and strutted with authority.

now. He's shooting all who resist him!"

"No, you cannot pass us," the spokesman told Dean in rough Spanish. "It is not permitted."

"What's the reason?" Dean demanded, anger rising.

"Orders, señor."

"Take me to Captain Diego," Dean requested.

"No, señor."

Dean argued, growing angrier. The *rurale* was unyielding.

Then from behind a large boulder stepped black-clad Captain Diego Monclova, holding a Spanish-make revolver on Dean. Diego was a big, handsome man of dark skin. "I arrest you, McDougal," he said, "for resisting my men."

"Arrest?" Dean echoed. "I've done nothing to be arrested for."

But through his head there flashed the suggestion that, perhaps Captain Diego already had got the news about the double killing by Brent McDougal.

Diego ignored Dean's protest. He said to his men, "Go get his guns and pull him out of the saddle."

Desperation swelled through Dean. If he could get fifty yards down the trail unhurt, and if that Spanish-make revolver was no more accurate than most of its kind, he might ride out of this unscathed.

All at once he dug hard spurs into Brasa and plunged the horse over the edge of the trail. The brush there was thick but he hit it like a Texas brushpopper, head on and hard. Captain Diego's gun roared its owner's fury at such defiance. Then came the crack of the guns of the *rurales*. Dean had moved so fast and suddenly, though, that no bullet touched him or horse.

But the second bound of his horse crashed Dean into a dead pine bough, knocking him from the saddle. His hands flew out, clutching at the brush. But his chest thumped into a pile of rocks and the side of his head slapped them hard. Things went black before his eyes, but he fought desperately to hold onto his senses. He tried to whirl and leap on his hands and feet into the deeper cover of the brush. But he was too nearly paralyzed to move. He could feel blood running down from a gash on the side of his head.

DEAN closed his eyes and forced himself to lie motionless. He heard Diego calling, "I got him! Killed him! But make sure, men."

Diego held a gun on Dean while the two men came down over the trail bank and looked at their captive. "He's not dead, just senseless, *Capitán,*" one called.

"It's just as well," said the captain. "My instructions were only to arrest him. We'll take him into camp. Let Don Andreo say next what he wants done. Tie him up."

Dean had to lie there and let the two *rurales* whip rawhide thongs onto his arms and legs, remembering in despair that Captain Diego, scourge of the Border, carried the commission of officer, judge and executioner in the field when in his own hard judgment the case merited it.

One of the men trotted back up the trail, disappeared into the forest and soon returned with three led horses. They threw Dean across one of these meal sack fashion, and lashed him there with a rope. Then Diego himself took the lead rope of Dean's new mount, and started back for the Roybal camp.

Captain Diego had left hapless bandits hanging to trees as object lessons of his power. The scoundrels of all these mountains feared his very name. So did many an honest man. He still was only in his early thirties, and so handsome that he never failed to kindle the black eyes of señoritas wherever he rode—except for the one, Carolina, whose admiration he wanted most.

The Roybal party was in camp at sunset. Dean heard the hush that fell over them when someone looked up and saw him being brought in tied across the back of a horse.

Don Andreo Roybal himself strode out to meet Diego. Don Andreo was a man you couldn't forget, six-feet-four, lean as a rawhide string, blue-eyed, fair-skinned, and very agile for a man of 73 years. His velvety sombrero was heavy with gold and his dark-red trousers glittered with silver conchas.

When Diego halted the horses, Don Andreo peered down at Dean's face. "So it's you," he said. Then he turned in an-

noyance and said, "You disobeyed me, Carolina. Get away from here."

Señorita Carolina Roybal stood there behind her grandfather, trim and tall and tantalizingly curved in black dress and mantilla. Whenever he saw her, Dean always noticed the pride and daring in her face, especially in the reckless arch of her eyebrows and the rounded wilfulness of her high forehead. Then he'd realize how startlingly beautiful this girl was—the perfection in every sensitive line of her slender face, from delicate nose and fragile cheek bones to full red lips.

But it was her eyes that always held Dean, black eyes, lustrous, soft and rich against the glow of a very fair skin.

Now, as he looked at her with his head upside down from where he hung on the horse, over her face there was sweeping something he'd never seen there before. Anger flamed into her eyes, and Dean knew that this wasn't the first time she'd rebelled against her grandfather.

"What's this for?" she demanded in pure Castillian Spanish. "Why did you do a thing like this, Captain Diego?" She was spinning about to confront the unhappy Diego Monclava. "Dean McDougal hasn't done anything to be arrested for! Untie him. Here, I'll do it!"

SHE RUSHED up to Dean and grabbed at the rawhide that had his wrists swelling by now. But her angry interference into his business annoyed Don Andreo. He clamped a hand onto her shoulder and said, "Carolina, this is my affair!"

The girl let go the rawhide and looked her grandfather squarely in the eyes. Dean thought that he'd never seen such fire burn in two pairs of eyes as the old man and girl measured each other. He'd heard of her wilfulness, of her refusal to be made into a retiring, church-and-family Mexican girl as her grandfather wished her to become.

Don Andreo had high Castillian blood in him. His hair, only partially grey now, had been fair. He'd married an Austrian girl, youngest daughter of Baron Von Graz, who came into Mexico on a hunt for gold treasure, and who utterly disowned his daughter when she married.

When Carmen Roybal, the daughter born to him and his Austrian wife, was fourteen they sent her to an exclusive girls' school in New York. But two years later Carmen eloped with William Knight, her riding instructor. They went out to Texas, where he started a ranch. Carmen died when Carolina was born, and her father went broke in the cow business, became a deputy sheriff and was killed.

Then Don Andreo went to Texas and brought Carolina—aged seven—back. He ignored her American name of Knight and she became Carolina Roybal. Upon her he'd heaped all his affections and his riches. She'd gone to school in a Maryland convent and a Paris finishing school. Then at her own demand she'd spent two years at the University of Texas.

That was the girl who defied the anger of her grandfather and turned again to untie Dean's hands. But old Don Andreo was thoroughly aroused. He'd yielded to this granddaughter too many times. He couldn't stand to see her step out of her place and defy him.

He said, "Captain Diego, she is not to unfasten the prisoner."

JUST then General Gaspar Gudino joined them. The tyrannical regime of Porfirio Diaz had kept on too many old generals and cabinet members, but Gaspar Gudino couldn't have been much above thirty. He was tall, well-built, dark, with pronounced lips, big nose and keen black eyes—a compelling man.

Gen. Gaspar said, "Permit me, Don Andreo. Otherwise, this might create an incident between Mexico and the United States."

Gaspar himself began untying Dean. But Captain Diego said, "General, this man resisted arrest. He and his father are dangerous men, trespassers on the estate of Don Andreo."

Don Andreo himself said, "*El Capitán* is right, General Gudino. Turn loose a bad man and you turn your own worry wild also. Keep him a prisoner, Diego."

Dean couldn't help flaring out at Don

Andreo, even as he hung there, head down, completely in the man's power. He exclaimed, "Who has found me bad? You, because you are stealing my father's ranch on a sham claim! Do you forget, Don Andreo, that even now revolt is flaming up all over Mexico against men like you? Haven't you heard the news that Francisco Madero is shouting a new *grito* to all Mexico? No, you go right on—"

Carolina exclaimed in excellent English with no trace of accent, "Hush, Señor McDougal! We're not bothered in here by talk of a revolution. Nor will your ugly words about stealing land help you. You heard the judge's fair decision on your ranch. Of all this you have no good argument. But the court gave grandfather no right to have you arrested just because you lost El Maltillo Rancho. Turn him loose, grandfather. Hear me, turn him loose, *Papaçito,*" and there came a touch of tenderness into her voice as she added her childhood pet name for the old man.

Dean almost forgot his plight in watching the clash of imperative, highstrung young woman and her lordly old grandfather who represented all that the cream of Mexican landed gentry ever had been.

Don Andreo had just won a decision in the federal court at Chihuahua City which gave him El Maltillo, the McDougal ranch down there in the little valley that lay almost lost from all Mexico. Eight thousand hectares, nearly 20,000 acres of rich rangeland and twice that much adjacent mountain range held on the public domain. The Mexican federal court had decreed the McDougal land to Don Andreo on a flimsy claim that went far back into Mexico's turbulent history.

Since the decision six days ago, Dean had hoped for nothing more than to get to the American border with his 2700 head of cattle and 800 graded-up horses, before wily old Andreo interpreted his court victory to include cattle and horses. But

now that Don Andreo's vaqueros had been killed Dean knew that getting his father out of Mexico came before any attempt to start a single hoof moving for the States.

"Carolina," Don Andreo at last measured out at her in his limited English that all the others save Dean might not understand, "go to your tent, stay in tent. No more interference. If you do, I cut you off my will without peso." The angered old Don trembled as he pointed a long bony finger toward the girl's tent.

Dean expected an explosion from Carolina. It was in her flaming dark eyes.

Then all at once she was a different girl. Tears were in her eyes, but she was smiling through them. She sprang toward Don Andreo and flung both arms about his neck.

"Ah, *carido mio*, let's don't quarrel. I love you too much. I won't give in. But I'll wait until your good old heart tells you that you're doing something very wrong."

THE OLD DON melted instantly and his arms went about Carolina. She gave his gaunt cheek an impulsive kiss. Then she turned back to Dean, saying, "Mr. McDougal, don't be afraid. Don Andreo is the best old rascal in Mexico. Aren't you, *Papaçito?*"

She pinched his cheek with white fingers, and gave him a warm flash of a smile. Then she marched off to her tent like an obedient child. But Dean knew that there wasn't the least surrender in her. She was taking the gracious way out because she felt that she was ultimately going to win. But this time, Dean realized, Don Andreo hadn't the least notion of yielding to her. He ordered Dean removed from the horse, and Captain Diego drew from his pocket a heavy, dog-leash chain. With this he padlocked Dean's leg to a small tree. Then he stationed a guard over the captive.

Dean sat down on the grass and watched the *arrieros* turn to the business of making camp. Don Andreo also was fetching in a pack train of supplies—twenty-two mules, well burdened.

Now, with the excitement abated, the Don's *arrieros* hurried to finish unloading the mules. With practiced skill the husky fellows pivoted heavy boxes and bags from the backs of the mules to their own knees and on the ground. They stacked all the goods into a pile, and covered them with the leathern pack-saddles called *aparejos*. Then they covered the whole with a coarse-textured sheet of seagrass. The *cocinero* staked the bellmare out in some good grass, knowing that no mule would wander far from her during the night.

It wasn't long then until the *cocinero* had coffee pot on and a stew going over the fire. To Dean there came the smell of chili stew, the boil of rice and frijoles being fried.

When the meal had been prepared and everyone fed but Dean, the unshaven *cocinero* brought his supper on a tin plate. The old fellow looked at the chain on Dean's leg and then shot a glance off toward Carolina and her grandfather.

"She said," the old *cocinero* whispered, "to tell you that you won't be here all night."

Dean hardly tasted the frijoles and tortillas he ate. Could the girl somehow manage to get him turned loose? He doubted it. Don Andreo was playing for too big a stake. And the precious minutes were spinning away, using out the time he had to act before Don Andreo and the hard Capitán Diego learned of the double killing by his father. When they found out about the two dead men, there'd be hell to pay. Dean's father would be lucky to get out alive, and Dean himself would get chased out without a hoof ahead of him.

Dusk fell deep over the camp. Diego brought Dean a soiled, old grey blanket,

just one, though there was a sharp fall chill in the mountain air.

Then over the camp there came a long, weird cry. It started low, then quickly reached a wild, shrill scream. Dean had heard it only once before—the savage cry of the dreaded cougar. It was coming from the rugged mountainside just above the camp.

Captain Diego stood still, his hand resting on the butt of his sword.

The horses down the way snorted and plunged. A dog barked out loudly. *Arrieros* froze rigid, wherever the sound happened to catch them. For a second cry was answering the first, from the opposite side of the canyon. Still louder, still more weird and blood-curdling. Then from up the canyon a third cry shrilled out, fierce and terrifying.

But the calls brought no terror to Dean. Instead, a warm swell of delight ran through him. No cougars ever surrounded a camp like this and called back and forth. Those cries came from the throats of Yaqui Indians.

Don Andreo and General Gudino hurried to the fire, where *arrieros* were tightening together. Carolina came with them. By now they all knew. The Yaquis hadn't caused Don Andreo trouble for twenty years, except that those who worked as vaqueros on the McDougal ranch kept the Don's own vaqueros in mortal fear of them. But Don Andreo was convinced this minute that he had them after him again.

Dean called to the frightened group, "Turn me loose. Then you won't need to be afraid."

GUDINO came toward Dean. "Is that it?" he asked. "But how could they know so soon about your—your being detained by us?"

Dean simply shrugged. He guessed that Teeno had gone straight to the Yaqui camp when, watching from a cliff ledge, he saw Dean taken prisoner. Dean thought that the Yaquis on the prowl were those friendly fellows who so often had visited the Yaqui vaqueros on his ranch—fairly civilized Indians, wearing white bell-bottomed pantaloons and huge straw sombreros. They were, though, a potential terror, once aroused.

Dean let Don Andreo and all the rest worry a tense minute. They huddled together, quick, excited words passing between them. They had a sizeable fighting force of their own, but this thing had caught them wholly unprepared. They were in such a vulnerable position, down here by the big campfire with Yaquis apparently all around them. Another shrill cry let loose from a rock ledge above.

Dean broke up the distressed talk of his captors with, "Turn me loose, Don Andreo. That's all they want."

A look of intense relief swept across the faces of Don Andreo and Gen. Gudino.

"No, we won't surrender," Captain Diego exclaimed. "I've got nine good men here. You have eight." *El Capitán* couldn't help whipping eyes toward Carolina, to see how she was taking his bravado.

Carolina wasn't looking his way at all. She was seizing her grandfather by the arm.

"*Papaçito,*" Dean heard her say, "don't let Captain Diego get us into a massacre."

It was a good time for Dean to call again. "Better turn me loose before Yaqui guns ask for it in plainer language."

There was an imperative ring in Dean's voice. Every man turned and looked at him. Then with quick decision, Don Andreo held out his hand toward Captain Diego.

"Give me the key," he demanded.

El Capitán began, "But, Don Andreo, this man may be in full league with—"

"Give it to me," Don Andreo repeated, and into his voice there came the irritation of a man long accustomed to instant obedience.

Captain Diego put hand into pocket and took out the key to the padlock on Dean's leg. Don Andreo snatched it and came over to Dean, bending down, fumbling with the padlock.

"Go, and hurry," he told Dean.

Dean wasn't in a hurry. He stepped over to face Gen. Gudino, and he motioned Don Andreo to join them. Carolina also stepped up. The firelight on her face betrayed her heightened fear.

Dean said, "The Mexican court gave you my land. That much I'll go along with—

rotten as it is. But they didn't give you my horses and cattle. I'm gathering them to get them off the ranch. And you better stay on your side of the range, Don Andreo, with all your men, until I'm gone."

CAPTAIN DIEGO wasn't content to let a dangerous man go unchallenged. He shook his fist at Dean. "Be careful with your talk. This Yaqui threat may bring the Mexican army in here. You're in no position to tell us anything. You threatened us with revolution; that will get you the firing squad—my fine Yaqui friend." There it was, to Diego the vilest insult he could throw at Dean.

Dean realized that at this moment Captain Diego was his most formidable enemy. The man had to be handled roughly. He clamped hand onto *El Capitan's* broad, hard shoulder.

"Listen, hombre," he said. "You still think in terms of the old way of doing things in Mexico. The big boys and their political supporters riding down little men everywhere—it's pretty late for that."

Dean's own words helped to crystallize in him his long felt sympathy with the Mexican peons—their humble state, their hungry bellies, their great patience with a flat level of life and their kingly courtesy to all.

Dean looked up to the mountainside. Then to the astonishment of those around him he shouted in Yaqui, "I'm riding out of this camp, my brothers. Meet me in the trail where the big rock looks like a sitting frog."

Dean turned back on his captors. He knew that not one of them understood a single word of what he had said in Yaqui.

To Don Andreo he said in Spanish, "Have them bring my horse. I know they captured it and brought it here."

Don Andreo opened his mouth to disobey the brash demand. Then he thought better of it and called an order to his pack train foreman.

While he waited for his horse, Dean moved aside from the group. They fell to talking in low, hushed tones. But Carolina didn't join in the talk. She was looking at Dean in a sort of strange fascination.

Then all at once the girl came toward him. She halted in front of him and the firelight touched the soft lines of her face as if in a caress. "Then," she said slowly in English, "it is true. You are part Yaqui."

Her question didn't come with the least contempt or condescension, yet it stirred in him a quick fire of resentment. He lashed back at her, "Yes, and I'm proud of it!"

He strode away from her, as if that ended whatever she had come to say to him. But she followed him, while all her men folks watched with ugly disapproval.

"Wait," she said, and her tone was an order. "I didn't mean it as you took it."

"Excuse me," he apologized.

HIS ANGER was gone as speedily as it had come, because he knew she was sincere. He seized both her shoulders and looked into the beautiful young face so alive with intense life. Then he began telling her what he wanted her to know.

He said, "My maternal great-grandfather, Leon Champlain, was a Frenchman, who migrated to Mexico as a political exile—a rebel against bad government. He came into these mountains looking for a gold mine and made friends with the Yaqui Indians. Then he married one, not even a chief's daughter, but she was a beautiful blond girl. I knew her before she died when I was a boy."

Don Andreo began drawing nearer, as if he too would hear this strange recital. Dean ignored him and went on.

Dean continued, "My grandfather, George Dillon, was one of the Texas Confederate soldiers—another rebel—who fled to Mexico after the end of the Civil War. He came into the Sierra Madres and happened to see one of the daughters of old Leon Champlain—and married her and turned squaw man. Then came my father, Brent McDougal, looking for new range, and he married a daughter of George Dillon—my mother."

The voice of Dean McDougal fell away until Don Andreo couldn't hear. Dean was talking only to this girl, herself the product of three different nations. It was as if to her he was making a plea for her tolerance and understanding, as against her back-

ground that had been all arrogant satisfaction with the dreamy hacienda world of Don Andreo Roybal.

"My mother died when I was eight years old," he told her. "She lived as a white rancher's wife, well educated. But on her lap I learned the Yaqui tongue. And for a month every year she took me back to her Yaqui people, that I might never forget. After she was gone, my father's mining and cattle business took me up among the Tarahumare Indians also. I picked up their language too, and their everlasting friendship. Of all this I am proud, Señorita Carolina."

His hands fell away from her shoulders. He stood looking into her upturned face a moment. A tall, rangy young man, all cowboy. All American. Yet there was something else in his bearing, his deep voice, in the very strength of him.

He whirled away from her, as if in sudden decision. A man was on the way with his own Brasa horse. He met the *arriero,* took Brasa and swung to the saddle. Then he rode off into the night.

Carolina stood there, still feeling the grip of his hands on her shoulders, still feeling the vibrant ring of his deep voice.

Don Andreo, standing near her, said, "Carolina, you know now what makes that young man and his father such intolerable neighbors. Why I had to get rid of them. Yaqui blood! Part and parcel of those wild beast cries that chilled me to the very bone."

Carolina said, "*Papaçito,* yes, I know. Now I know his blood—Scotch and French and Texas—and Yaqui. And I hate him for it all!"

She spun about and ran for her tent, leaving her bewildered grandfather standing there with his mouth open and his eyes narrowed.

AT THE BIG rock by the trail, which sat on other rocks like a resting frog, Dean waited. It was moonlight now. Ahead of him the giant pine trees seemed to shove the trail aside for standing room. Ragged cliffs frowned out above. Deep below him a waterfall sang its eternal serenade to the trees and the rock walls and the vast silence. And off through a break in the timber, far out there below, Dean could feel more than see the majestic sweep of Valle Verde, forty miles long and half as wide. Brooding in peace tonight. But perhaps only for tonight.

It wasn't long until Dean heard the soft tread of Yaqui moccasins. Forms began to emerge in the shadows. But only four of them. And these turned out to be not Yaquis on the prowl but vaqueros from his own ranch. Tarahumare Teeno was one of the four. They laughed in low, keen satisfaction at Dean's exclamation of surprise.

"How'd you happen to be up there tonight?" Dean asked in Yaqui.

Tsi-sah said, "We met Teeno in the trail. We were coming to find you. Your father is in trouble. Bad."

"Have they arrested him?" Dean asked quickly.

"Nobody knows about it yet but us."

"How have you kept it from the Roybal hacienda people?"

"The vaqueros were three. Two of them your father killed."

"And the other?"

"In the woods. Tied up, this one."

"Thank God! How did it happen?"

"A colt they steal. A fine young stud colt. This your father does not like."

"But he wouldn't have shot them for that."

"No, he tells them he takes them to the judge. So they try to shoot him. But the fight isn't long, nor big. He shoots two of

them and the other man quits. So we tie him up, begging for his life."

Dean said, "Well, the quicker we get back there the better. But you, Teeno, go back tonight and find my pack train. Then bring them on home by some other trail, no matter how hard it is."

"I know the way," said the Tarahumare, and he faded off into the night.

Dean rode out ahead of the three Yaquis. Unlike the Tarahumare, these Yaqui vaqueros didn't care for foot travel. They had their horses hidden out in a side arroyo farther down, and presently they were lined out behind Dean on horses of El Maltillo Rancho. There were few better horses in all northern Mexico.

IT WAS well after midnight when Dean reached El Maltillo. The ranch house was modest six-room adobe with its heavy log beams protruding below the edge of the flat, dirt roof. From the house came a quick challenge, "Who's that?" Never before had Dean known his father to demand identification of a man before he reached his door. There was fear in his voice.

Dean found his dad dressed. He had been lying on a big leather couch in the living room, awake. Dean knew that from here on they'd be haunted night and day by the fear of Don Andreo's revenge. Dean took comfort in the thought that they'd already marketed their fall steers, and that in an El Paso bank there was nearly $35,000.

Brent McDougal was a man of powerful, but gaunt build, in height and shoulders. He had a long face and a big nose. The strength of that face was in the heavy jawbones and blue eyes. Ever since Dean could remember, his dad had dressed colorfully, as he was now in an expensive red wool shirt, moleskin riding breeches, and polished brown boots, knee-high.

He didn't ask Dean how the case in court had gone. All he asked was, "How long do they give us to get out?"

"What time we can snatch," Dean replied.

His father looked at Dean a long time. Dean knew that something mighty weighty was going on in that long, rugged head which still hadn't a thread of gray in the curly, carrot-hued hair.

At last Brent McDougal said, "Son, how keenly do you feel this thing?"

"Plenty, Dad."

"Enough to stake it all, maybe your life, on one throw of the dice?"

It was Dean's turn to take a long look at his father. In the big rancher's blue eyes was fire.

"Shake, Dad," Dean said, extending his hand.

Brent McDougal reached out and took his son's hand. Each of them knew that they were committing themselves to a desperate struggle. His father asked him a few questions and Dean told him what had happened up in the mountains when he tried to pass the Roybal camp.

Brent McDougal said, "Dean, I can go to bed now and sleep. We've got company in the spare bedroom. In the morning you'll have a talk with him."

"Who is he?" Dean asked.

"Name's Villa. Pancho Villa."

"Never heard of him," Dean said "What's he here for?"

"You'll find out in the morning. I've heard of him. He was a bandit at one time. A dangerous one, too. But the man's got something on his heart. Something big. But I don't know—maybe he still is a killer."

THE GUEST was in no hurry to get up the next morning. Dean and his dad waited breakfast for him. When the man came out of his room Dean ran appraising eyes over the big fellow. In his middle thirties, maybe, and inclined to stoutness. But he had piercing dark-brown eyes and a sharp alertness that told of a shrewd, quick mind.

All through breakfast Dean had the feeling that Pancho Villa was studying him, piecing together in his mind his qualities as reflected in appearance and speech.

Villa spoke no English. In rather crude Spanish he questioned Dean about his encounter with the Roybal party, and about the court procedure that gave this ranch to Don Andreo. Before Dean could get one question well answered, Villa was firing

another at him—an impatient man driven on by an inward urge.

At last Villa said, "You can have all the time you need to get your cattle out, when I take over. Come go with me to the Roybal hacienda tonight, boy. We're not invited, understand." He laughed heartily. "It's a secret meeting with the peons of the hacienda."

Dean looked at the big man searchingly. "Revolution—here?" he asked.

"As good a name as any for it," Villa replied. "Go with me tonight. I'm raising an army. Fast cavalry. Men who can ride through hell and back."

Dean was stunned by the thought. Revolution already was breaking over Mexico, it was true. But here, in this little valley where nothing more serious than infrequent Yaqui raids ever had disturbed the serenity of the generations, revolution was a different matter.

"Well, I'm not so sure," Dean said. "Are you going to the meeting, Dad?"

"Yes. What else have we left to do?"

"Get out the best we can," Dean answered.

Villa scoffed with, "Never. Not as long as you're a man!"

Pancho Villa had force, decisiveness. He could make a man feel his mood, and it wasn't a nice one this morning.

"But," Dean objected, "this is too drastic a thing—too terrible to think about."

"You'll go with me?" Villa ignored his objections.

"No, I'm afraid not."

But as the hours wore by Dean changed his mind. He felt that if this thing had come to Valle Verde he couldn't escape it. He wanted to know what was going happen. And, above all, he wanted to know more about this man Villa.

Nevertheless, during the day he and his father began the roundup. Pancho Villa rode out with them. Dean recognized in him at once a horseman of the true vaquero breed. When Villa looked at the hundred head of Maltillo horses in the first big pasture, his interest kindled.

Horses came up to Dean, with low little whinnies for him. He'd gentled many of them himself.

ALL OF A SUDDEN it hit Dean hard. This fellow Villa had spoke of their having time to get their cattle out. He hadn't mentioned getting horses out. But he had talked about fast cavalry, and so far as Dean knew Pancho Villa had few fast horses anywhere. Villa was eyeing the McDougal horses appraisingly.

They rode by the place where a Yaqui Indian stood guard over the survivor of the fight with Brent McDougal. As they rode up, the poor wretch began begging for his life. Pancho Villa took charge of the talk.

"Why were you stealing that colt?" he demanded, as if he'd been the owner.

"I'd never owned a good horse all my life," the peon admitted. "We had been told that El Maltillo Rancho soon would go to Don Andreo. He has too many horses and cattle already. We were going to get us a good horse each and hide them out for a spell."

"Exactly," Villa said, laughing. "Don Andreo Roybal, the old hog, has too many horses and cattle. You have none. Several million more Mexicans have no horses. Stand up. Throw back your shoulders."

The astonished peon did as told. He was a small man, but of the wiry, durable kind. Pancho Villa cut the rawhide that had held him.

"Now you are a man, my friend," Villa said. "Señor McDougal and his son will hold no grudge. They also know that old Roybal has too many horses. But he takes their land, all of it. Also, their cattle and horses. But not yet. We have a meeting tonight. I want you there, standing up for me. What are you called?"

"Carlos Rodirigues."

"Good, Carlos. Just remember, old Roybal has too much land and cattle. Still he robs the McDougals."

Dean couldn't understand how Villa hoped to keep information of the meeting from reaching Don Andreo. In this man's wild heart there seemed to brood always a fury of emotions that would feed more and more on strife. Dean suspected that Villa didn't care too much if the news did leak out, that Villa even might welcome an immediate clash with Don Andreo.

All that day cattle poured into the bunch-

ing ground in the home pasture. She stuff, calves, bulls and younger steers. Earlier in the fall they'd trailed a herd of three-and four-year-old steers to the border.

Dean and his father were in the saddle all day. Every few hours Dean steamed in with a bunch of Yaqui vaqueros shoving cattle before them. Dean immediately roped a fresh horse from the remuda and struck out on circle again. By sunset he was riding down his fourth horse.

As the day spent itself, Villa grew more restless. Perhaps within his own turbulent heart there was an urge to be about the destiny which he himself didn't understand as yet—the sort of hell-ridden strife he was born for.

HARDLY had Dean and his dad eaten supper before Villa had them back in the saddle. It was light dusk when he nosed his big black horse toward the hacienda of Don Andreo Roybal—and Carolina.

A mile from the McDougal ranch house Villa halted and listened. Dean saw Villa's big black horse throw up its head and prick ears toward a mountainside. Then the horse neighed, and it had a peculiar heavy neigh that ended with an added little nicker.

Villa patted the horse's neck and laughed softly. "Listen. Gato has a mate and they don't like to be apart."

Down from the mountainside came the neigh of another horse, and Villa laughed softly again.

"*Mi Dorados,*" he said almost lovingly. "The Golden Ones."

He sat there on Gato and waited in the deepening dusk. It wasn't long until horsemen began to appear out of the pine woods. Eight of them. Solid, silent fellows under huge peon hats. But each had a cartridge-filled bandaleer belt hanging from shoulder to opposite side—the early uniform of what was going to be eventually the famous charging *Dorados* of so many reckless battles. The Golden Ones!

Even now the coming of these men out of the darkness gave Dean a greater feeling of uneasiness. It was as if Villa had arranged to the minute for a rendezvous with this nucleus of his army, showing his command of men who never before had known military discipline.

But Villa didn't take his *Dorados* all the way to the hacienda. He left them with the horses half a mile from the outside village. The rural police always had been a mortal enemy of Pancho Villa, and nowadays the federal army was backing the *rurales* up closely. Villa was a daring man and he knew how to hate, but he also had a keen sense of timing. This wasn't the time for his few *Dorados* to measure out blood with federal troops and *los rurales*. Not yet.

Dean and his dad tied their horses to trees, near other horses. He felt the brand of one of them. It was the hammer of his dad's own Maltillo rancho! Another horse wore the same hammer, and Dean knew with deepening dread that Villa had invited their Yaqui Indians who had always been hostile to the hacienda, to the important meeting. Now he understood why Yaquis had been on the prowl from their mountain village. The unrest of all Mexico had seeped back into their hearts also.

It gave Dean a queer sensation, stealing along afoot toward the hacienda. They crossed a two-acre patch of chili and then went through a cane field. The two-story country seat mansion originally had been flanked on three sides by the homes of the peons, rows of long adobe houses. The whole was enclosed in a high adobe wall with only one big gate at front and back. But in later years increasing population and freedom from raids had caused the peon homes to overrun the walls and cluster out into an unwalled village.

By prearrangement a guide met them on the outskirts of the village, and led them to a large old warehouse which had been recently emptied of wool as it was packed muleback over the mountain. The warehouse stood not a dozen steps from the great wall surrounding the older section. Dean felt a sense of guilt toward Señorita Carolina. She probably was just across that wall, feeling very secure behind it and the two centuries of reign by her grandfather's people.

There was no light in the warehouse. Three men lurked by the door, challenging

all comers. But when they heard the name of Pancho Villa, the challenge changed to welcome. Dean and his father were accepted, because they were with Villa.

WHEN Dean walked inside, his nostrils met the smell of cigarette smoke and unbathed bodies mingled with the older odors of wool and age. But still there was no light. Each man had to feel his way along. A few times Dean heard low murmurs and brief whisperings. The Roybal hacienda contained a total of something like 1200 people, but a trusted advance agent of Pancho Villa had screened out only about fifty peons for this meeting —those daring enough for what they were going to hear tonight.

Villa wasn't long getting down to business. He lit a match and held it up so they all could see his face. Then he flipped the match away and began talking in the dark with tremendous persuasion and conviction—REVOLUTION!

Villa denounced Don Andreo and the riches the man had added to the riches he had inherited. He pictured men, good, honest, hard-working men, compelled to grovel before this great land owner all their lives and all the lives of their children and their children's children—unless they rode with *Los Dorados!*

"The Golden Ones!" Villa said in a voice like a benediction. "Oh, come ride with my Golden Ones."

Dean grew sick to his very heart. This man was a firebrand. He was going to set these people's hearts aflame. And on and on, over Mexico, the fire would rage.

"No," Dean told himself, "I can't do it."

He foresaw too well what it would mean. Yet in his heart he had to concede that Pancho Villa was building on enough truth to justify and even sanctify his cause.

Villa wasn't a man of long words. He drove hard and straight at what he wanted —soldiers. Men with rebellion in their hearts. And he played eloquently on the fervent patriotism of Mexico. Love of freedom lay deep in the hearts of these swarthy-skinned peons whose bloodstream came down from the once great Aztec people.

"Join me," Villa cried. "Fight for your freedom. It is better to die on your feet than beg on your knees! Come on up, men! *Mi sargento* will write your name down on Mexico's great roll of honor. Come ride with the Golden Ones!"

Despite Villa's harangue, volunteers were slow to sign up. This was a desperate step for peons who had never known anything but blind loyalty to Don Andreo. Old blankets and tarpaulins were hung over the high windows and candles lighted.

Villa came back to Dean and his father. The man's fiery brown eyes burned hot with excitement, conviction. He said to Dean, "How about it? I need you for a lieutenant. More than that. I need you to go into the United States and get to me guns and ammunition."

Dean shook his head. "No."

Villa looked at him in surprise. But he didn't protest. He turned on Brent McDougal. "And you?" he asked.

McDougal said, "I'll have to go with my boy."

Dean had feared his father was ripe to throw in with Villa. It was a relief to know that his father also had felt the deep underlying significance of this thing, and couldn't lend himself to it.

Again quick disappointment flashed over Villa's mobile face. But he was good-natured about it. "You'll join me in time," he said, and he turned at once to the business of enrolling wavering men.

OVER in the *quinta,* Carolina walked into the office of Don Andreo where her grandfather and tall, young Gen. Gudino were in grave talk. Don Andreo waved her out with angry hand.

He said reproachfully, "The whole hacienda is plotting my ruin. Such affairs are not for you, Carolina."

Carolina's wilfulness was gone now and in its place was desperate concern. She said, "*Papaçito,* one of the maids has just told me that—"

"I know it, I know it," Don Andreo broke in. "And I'm just talking it over with Gen. Gudino. Captain Diego hasn't enough men and we've sent out a courier for a cavalry troop. But the cavalry is—"

"But Captain Diego is attacking them—

right now!" Carolina cut him off. "He is going to pretend to arrest them. When they don't throw up their hands he's going to start shooting them down. That's what the maid says. She's been seeing one of the *rurales*—a love affair."

Don Andreo looked at her sharply. "You know this to be true?" he asked.

Before she could answer Gen. Gudino asked hastily, "And what's the plan? I mean, where is Diego now? We can't let such a thing happen! I've had one experience already with such a powder keg!"

"I've told you all I know." Carolina paused, fingering gently the yellow rose beside the big comb in her black hair. Then she said, "Except this: Brent McDougal and his son Dean are at the meeting."

"They are?" Don Andreo exclaimed, in greater alarm. "Why, it's their plot then to get back at me for putting them off my property. That's it, Gen. Gudino, their plot! Oh, if we only had a troop of cavalry here now!"

Gen. Gudino flashed a quick look at Carolina. He said, "Yes, Don Andreo, you

have hit upon the real cause of this rebellion —Yankee bad faith after the courts ruled against them. Arrest them and this bandit Villa, and you have nothing more to worry about. But we'll have plenty to worry about if Diego shoots into this secret meeting. He'll make martyrs of them."

"Come on, let's go stop him," Don Andreo urged. "But not you, Carolina."

"Let her go if she wants to," Gen. Gudino said, hoping to show off to her a general's power of command.

Once outside the surrounding wall, Carolina felt a tremor run through her. The clash was so near. Dean McDougal was to be arrested with his father. She knew the ruthlessness of Captain Diego. Even here at this hacienda he might elect to exercise his authority in the field and hang the McDougals on the ground of insurrection and defiance of a court decree.

"*Papaçito,*" she suddenly said, halting, "I—I don't think I want to go on with you, after all."

"Then go back," Don Andreo said, relieved to be rid of her.

GUDINO didn't have the temerity to urge her on when the mission out into the village was fraught with real danger. Even the general seemed to be sensing the nearness of tragic happenings.

The moment she was alone in the darkness, Carolina was swept by greater fear. She might be too late. This moonlight night around her seemed charged with danger. Shadows became lurking *rurales* or rebellious peons. Every bark of excited dogs told her of stealthy forms creeping toward the old wool warehouse where the secret meeting had been reported taking place.

Carolina turned around the corner of a low adobe house that smelled of fermenting pulque. Under its cover she tried to beat her grandfather to the warehouse. She knew they would pause somewhere near the warehouse, hoping to intercept the too valiant Diego and his *rurales*.

Carolina, panting for breath, reached the front door of the warehouse. The three guards looked at her, a tall, slender girl in dark Spanish dress. Curly black hair. High comb and black mantilla fluttering in a stir of wind. Beauty, as if in strange apparition. But still flesh and blood, the lady of the *quinta*. Not for this meeting for a surety.

But Señorita Carolina seized the arm of the man who barred her. With unexpected strength she pushed him aside. "Get out of my way, Tomás," she exclaimed. "I've got to stop a slaughter here."

She was through the door before the awed, embarrassed man could stop her. It took her a moment to get her eyes accustomed to the dim light of the candles. Then two men were hurrying toward her. Dean McDougal and a tall, flashing-eyed man she didn't know.

"Dean," Carolina burst out, "get out of

here. They're coming to arrest you and your father."

"And me, no doubt, Señorita?" asked the tall man with the fierce brown eyes. "I am Pancho Villa, at your service, Señorita," and he bowed with surprising gallantry.

Carolina whipped anxious, dark eyes onto the man whom she had heard of only as a dangerous bandit leader. Villa was appraising her, and she felt herself cringe under his marauding look.

"Break up this meeting, quick. Get out the back way," she urged Villa. "The *rurales,* they—"

"They're only eight men," Villa laughed at her. "Look, here I have a dozen new volunteers. But it isn't time yet to fight this hacienda. Not the time yet, Señorita," and his big hand came out to pat her shoulder with a familiarity that she shrugged off quickly. Villa laughed softly again and repeated, "Not the time yet, Señorita Carolina."

The very words of the man shot through the girl an unreasoning fear of him. He was so sure of himself, so menacingly honest in his veiled personal threat to her.

DEAN noticed that the peons were fast vanishing out windows and the back door. They even disappeared into the shadows of the heavy, age-darkened log vigas overhead. Villa hurried back to his new recruits who huddled together now, strangely afraid of the step they had taken. He took them trailing after him, out the back door. Dean stayed there, facing the girl.

"Get your father and hurry away," Carolina urged Dean.

Dean said, "I haven't joined the rebels. I've nothing to run from."

But the emptiness of his avowal hit him the instant the words were out. Ever since he'd been a small boy the power of Don Andreo Roybal had hedged him in, kept him filled with a sense of insecurity. That same power any hour now might be turned toward punishment of his father for the killing of the two vaqueros.

Carolina exclaimed, "But you're against us. You can't help being. And—and—it's a bad time to be against us."

Dean returned, "Yes, and it's a bad time for your grandfather to get this Pancho Villa against him."

"It's just a bad time for us all. Now go—"

A shot drowned out her words, left her standing there with a look of dismay spreading over her lovely face. Then from beyond the back door came the ugly staccato of a Browning machine gun, and shouts broke out in accompaniment. A man who suddenly knew he was dying wailed in agony.

Still came the vicious spurts of the Browning. The few shots that tried to reply sounded feeble and foolish against that killer gun.

Dean stood there like a pillar of concrete, his eyes on Carolina Roybal. Even in that paralyzed moment he was aware of the brilliant contrast of her black eyes and black silk dress with the yellow rose in her hair. And those black eyes brimmed with something like sudden hurt and fear and a deeply distressed pity for all this valley.

Men were breaking through the rear door, fleeing back into the old warehouse. The machine gun had spent its belt of death upon those outside but the single-shot rifles were taking up the barking, like pups imitating a big dog. One poor wretch staggered into the warehouse, arms hugging at his bowels.

Dean leaped for the front door, threw the great wooden bar into place. When he came back, Carolina still stood there. It was she now who was rigid with horror.

Dean said to her, "Come here, I'll let you out the front door while there's time. This warehouse will be a fort in the next thirty seconds."

But Pancho Villa was within hearing. The man's face was fury in itself. Fury at Carolina Roybal.

He cried, "You sent us outside into that trap! Now you'll stay in here with us and see it through!"

"No," Dean ruled hastily. "Let her out. Come on, Carolina."

Dean seized her by the shoulder and half thrust her toward the door. He hoped there still was time for her to get out before the *rurales* and peons had their guns on the front door.

VILLA wouldn't be crossed during a battle. He thrust himself at Dean, tore his hand from the girl's shoulder. Wicked fire flew into his eyes that noticed suddenly were too small for his full round face and utterly without mercy.

"She stays in here with me." Villa's jaws bit hard.

Dean's words were low, deep, and commanding. "Keep your hands off her, Villa. I'm taking her out!"

Villa stepped backward. His hand leaped to the handle of a Smith & Wesson in his hip holster. He said just the one word, "*Nunca*—Never!"

It was a desperate moment. Dean knew he must put Carolina out of the place if he died for it. He also knew that Pancho Villa was ready to kill him rather than be robbed of this girl who might prove the hostage to pay for his freedom, even his life.

All at once Dean was smiling at the enraged Villa. "Pancho," he said, "you're too big a man to shoot me in the back." Then with abrupt recklessness, Dean whirled his back to Villa, seized Carolina in his arms and started for the front door. He didn't know whether he would get a bullet between the shoulders or not, but he kept going, too afraid to look back.

Behind him he heard a louder clamor at the rear door. More men were piling in, some wounded, others in panic. Still Dean didn't look around. He felt cold shivers begin to creep over his back. He felt, too, the soft warmth of a young woman in his arms. The thrill of her swept over him until he couldn't help gripping her tighter as he strode toward the front door with her.

Then a new sound reached his ears. Pancho Villa was back near the rear door, shouting quick orders. The field general was taking charge. There would be time enough later to settle with Dean McDougal —if there was any later time left to both of them.

At the door Dean put Carolina down and jerked up the heavy bar.

All he could say was, "Get out. Make for the hacienda gate."

She paused just a second. "I knew you were such a man," she said softly. Then she slipped through the door and ran into the night. Dean heard a clamor of voices outside, and he could see the flare of crude torches. They recognized her. She was safe with her own side.

Dean pushed the heavy door shut and let the bar fall back into place. Then he stood motionless. Still he was hearing her soft words, almost a whisper, "I knew you were such a man." Still he felt her body in his arms, and it was like nothing he ever had felt tingling through him before.

Pancho Villa's voice rang through the room. "Get to the windows, men. Use guns if you have them. If not, fight them with a—*machete!*"

Each man put his hand upon that ugly Mexican fighting tool, and under Villa's fiery words, they rallied.

DEAN ran alarmed eyes over the fighters a second time. Then a slow dread hit him. His father wasn't back in the warehouse. Had he made his getaway? Or did he lie out there with the dead?

Dean ran across to men near the rear door. Among them were three of the Yaqui vaqueros from his El Maltillo rancho.

He asked them, "The boss—where is he?"

Three separate answers came. "Gone away," said one Yaqui. Another exclaimed, "Maybe they got him." And a third said, "Dead."

Dean lunged for the door, seized the wooden bar. But Pancho Villa was there too, holding the bar down in place.

"No, they'd come in on us," Villa ruled. "We'll go out all right. But not until they're sure we wouldn't try a crazy charge out of here."

"But my father may be out there on the ground, dying," Dean protested angrily.

"That's war," Villa retorted. "The door stays shut."

Dean said, "Then let's get busy for that charge."

"That's more like it," Villa replied.

Villa turned and flashed a true leader's eye over the strength they had in the warehouse. Dean saw only four of his Yaquis and seven of the peons who'd volunteered. At least four of these were wounded, one

soggy with blood. An eighth peon was dying on the dirt floor. Counting him out, Dean and Villa themselves made exactly thirteen inside the warehouse.

The peons had no weapons except knives and machetes. The Yaquis had Colt .44's, furnished to his vaqueros by Dean's father.

A second peon, cousin to the one dying on the floor, bent over the poor fellow. Dean heard the dying man say, "My little girl, Manuelita—and Padre Duran."

Villa also heard the request. He had no use for priests himself, yet this savage man born to fight walked to a window and called out, "A man is dying in here. Send him the priest, and his little girl—what's her name?"

"Manuelita Vigil."

"Manuelita Vigil," Villa called out the window. "And get her here fast—or it'll be too late."

Captain Diego shouted from the outside, "He doesn't deserve the least pity. Let him die."

But that hard answer was from Diego only. Over the rest of the excited people outside there seemed to come a gradual pall. They didn't shout so much. The battering on front door stopped. Nobody tried to shoot through the windows.

THE LULL grew outside. Inside the warehouse, the groans of the dying man came only intermittently, and even this man tried to hush his lament against going. Villa himself, though, didn't stop. Dean saw him roving his fierce eyes over the warehouse, surveying its possibilities.

Villa came to Dean and said, "When I go, come out with me. Come shooting. And yelling. Scare hell out of them."

Then Villa moved to a Yaqui and told him the same thing. He went on to the next and the next, bending down low and blowing out candles as he reached them.

Dean was put on the spot. If he went out of here fighting with Villa, from that moment on he would be branded as a Villista, a rebel, subject to being shot any moment the federal troops could lay hands on him. He couldn't go out with them and not shoot, for his very life would depend on stopping guns that would be trying to knock him down. But what if he stayed in here, alone with the dying man?

He saw the picture all too quickly. Diego would seize him. *El Capitán* might make quick use of his power of life and death in the field, and under that power order him shot. The least Dean could expect would be arrest and trial for conspiracy against the Diaz regime. His very presence here in this meeting with Pancho Villa was ground enough for that.

The padre knocked loudly at the door. Villa himself answered and made the priest assure him that nobody would attempt to attack through the door when it opened.

The withered old priest came in. With him was Manuelita Vigil, a little girl of about six. She was a sweet little black-eyed thing with a slender, sensitive face.

After he bolted the door again, Villa took Manuelita up into his arms. He said to the priest, "Go do your job," and his big head jerked toward the dying father of the child.

Villa walked the other way, holding the little girl in his arms and talked to her. Dean heard him saying, "Now, sweetheart, your papa is hurt a little. He wants to see you so he will feel better."

Dean was never to forget the complete change of Pancho Villa in that minute. He was not a warrior, not an ex-bandit, but a very tender man with a strange passion for children.

"I'm going to take you over to your papa in a moment, Manuelita," Villa went on. "You must say something sweet and nice to him. Tell him you will be a good little girl and love him always. Will you do that for me, Manuelita?"

Manuelita couldn't help the tremble in her babyish voice but she said, "*Sí*, Señor, I'll tell him."

Villa then took Manuelita over to her father lying there on the dirt floor. Dean saw the peon's face brighten into a smile. Villa brushed the priest aside a moment and bent down over Ricardo Vigil, putting Manuelita down by him.

Manuelita hugged her papa's head to her, but she wasn't brave enough to get out the words Villa had told her to say. She looked up at Villa as if in fear and apology and big tears swam into her eyes.

"Papa, I love you!" she managed to murmur, and then she was hugging her father's head tighter and sobbing.

Villa turned away, deep pain on his face. He said, "Bless her little heart. She knows."

They took Manuelita away and the priest left a moment later. The door was barred and it was as if that sad, tender interlude had never been. Villa continued to make the rounds, blowing out candles. When the last candle was out, Dean could see only dimly from light reflected by the torches outside. The noisy machine gun and all the rifles were quiet now. But there came the click of bolts thrown home behind new cartridges.

Villa went to the front door and began shouting to his men, "Here, boys. Get ready. Everybody. Hurry! Hurry!"

He made his voice sound just subdued enough for those outside to hear and believe he was in dead earnest about concentrating on the front door. But those inside were hunching down in the darkness at the back door.

Dean once more was faced with his choice. Stay, for the inevitable reckoning—or make the dash with Pancho Villa.

BEFORE he'd made up his mind, there came the shout of Diego. "Dean McDougal," he called, "I have your father a prisoner. He will be shot within two minutes if you don't surrender!"

Dean's heart turned colder and colder. He stood there, hardly able to think. The seconds ticked away, and over by the rear door a dark little cluster told him that here was the time of decision. Two ways. Go with Villa and forsake his dad to the perilous reality of Diego's threat? Or surrender and hope for some long chance that certainly didn't seem to be in the cards?

With each passing second Dean became surer of one thing. Out in the open, on the loose, he still could fight. Some way—even with Pancho Villa—some desperate way. In Diego's hands, there'd be no way, not even a desperate one.

"Quick, Dean McDougal, surrender!" *El Capitán's* Spanish broke in. "The time shortens. Twice count to five. *Una, dos, tres—*"

The counting was cut short. Diego himself had drawn most of his excited men to the front. The back door flew open. With its slam came the cries of the few startled besiegers there. Then above them came war cry of Pancho Villa himself. His newly enlisted peons joined in with him, and above all the shouts rose the fierce Yaqui war cry.

Already the little Villa party was charging out. Dean had no choice left. He sped for the back door, seizing a brilliant red and blue serape as he ran. Villa's tight little group was pouring bullets in all directions. This left Dean to bring up the rear, the most dangerous end of this charge. He flung the serape over himself, hoping that thus he wouldn't be an obvious target.

But he was into it now, his heart filled with fear. His gun blazed at the *rurale* who was levelling a rifle at him. The gun bucked with its blaze, and the *rurale* fell. Now Dean was an outlaw, a revolutionist.

He sped on, shooting only when he had to. Stones and clubs showered at him. A few bullets tore around him. Knives flashed for him. But it was nearly dark. Pancho Villa himself had seen to that by shooting the torch bearers as he went out.

Dean's gun ran empty. A knife would have to do him until he could get more ammunition from one of the Yaquis.

They made it off into the night. Behind them swirled angry bedlam. Dean could hear the enraged shouts of *El Capitán* above all the others. And Dean kept listening for the dread sound of a sudden volley—the firing squad.

He was up alongside Villa. They sprang over a stone fence and Villa led the way down alongside it. But Dean had him by the arm.

"Wait, let's go back," Dean said. "I've got to get my father."

"Back, hell!" Villa retorted. "This is the beginning of real war!"

"Then," Dean said, "I'm going back alone."

Villa slammed back at him, "Try to kill two for me before they get you—if you have to go back and ask for it."

(To be continued in the next issue)

Olga of Ogallala

By Ben T. Young

IT WAS late afternoon of a midsummer Saturday. The week's work on the Diamond D was done, and Watkins Deerwester—who was all-hands-and-the-cook and owner as well—was unsaddling his Warbonnet horse. He was whistling *Hot Time*. Wat sure felt like he had the world by the tail on a downhill pull.

A body would have thought that Wat, being a healthy young buck and free as a hawk, would have been getting all slicked up to go hightailing off to town to kick up his heels with the girls. But not Wat. All Wat ever did want—especially since getting back from fighting the Spaniards down in Cuba the year before—was peace and quiet; and there was ample of that on his two-bit spread beside the North Platte River.

Gals, now, with their giggling and switching around and batting their eyes, made Wat uneasy as seven men on a cot; and he was a dogged sight happier right here at home, alone save for his ponies. Maybe gals were fun, but Wat could have plenty fun with his guns, or reading the mail-order catalogue, or just watching the sky stay up. Fooling with she-stuff was dangerous as kicking a loaded polecat. Let them as wanted a wife and kids go dancing.

HIS MA always said the worth of a thing is best known by the want of it, and that sure applied to women

His surprised ears had caught the soft rattle of wheels and singletrees, and wagons along that road were scarce as leaves on a cactus. He looked around. *Hot Time* petered out between his teeth. He put the saddle on the corral fence.

The curved, canvas top of a movers'

If a man wanted a wife, this Olga would fill the bill

wagon had appeared down around the cottonwood-screened bend. Wat sleeved the sweat from his forehead, and there was a frown of annoyance where the sweat had been. On the seat beside the driver sat a woman, and even a married woman—if she were young enough—could make Wat mighty spooky. He hoped they'd go right by.

But they didn't. "Whoa," said the man, then handed the reins to the woman and got stiffly to the ground.

Wat was relieved to see that the man had some age on him because then the woman likely did too. Anyhow, she looked well-fixed for tallow and ugly as a Mex sheep, and such women didn't make Wat squirm so much. "Hi," he greeted as the man slouched toward him.

"Howdy." The stooped, snipe-gutted jigger rested a frazzled boot on the bottom rail of the corral fence and gazed out over the river, then turned his eyes on Wat. "How fer to the next town?"

"Just two whoops'n' a holler," Wat said encouragingly. "Nice place called Chimney Rock."

Turning wearily, the man let fly a stream of tobacco juice. "Too fer, with night a-comin' on," he sighed, jerking his thumb toward the sun settling behind a cloud bank. "One o' my team has went lame. Mind if we camp here?"

Wat did mind, but being a kindly cuss he didn't like to cause a lame horse further discomfort. "No. Pull right into the yard," he invited. "Help yourself to the firewood, and oats for your team. Then turn 'em into the pasture."

As the man shambled away, Wat began shucking his chaps. He heard the woman giving orders, heard the outfit come in off the road. Then he heard a muttering behind him, turned and faced not the expected two, but three people.

His mouth fell open. His eyes stood out on stems. He wanted to cut and run because the third person—who must have been riding inside the wagon—was just the sort of a girl he was most afraid of and just the kind he wanted to avoid.

"Neighbor," the man said, extending a bony claw, "Godbey's the name. This here's my woman. The gal's my niece. She's called Olga Otway."

Having dragged off his hat Wat dropped it, took Godbey's limp hand and managed to mumble his own name. "Make yourselves comfortable," he said, wishing he could light out for the badlands.

"Your fambly to home?" Mrs. Godbey demanded in a voice like a west Texas wind.

"No, ma'am." Wat shook his head. "They died and left me this layout."

"Consid'able of a shebang fer a lone man," she asserted, turning to inspect the house, a two-room squared-log outfit with a leanto off the kitchen.

"Yes'm," Wat gulped, nervously working his toes inside his boots because he knew without looking that the girl was quietly laughing at him.

After a moment the awkward silence was broken by distant thunder. "My land, it's a-goin' to weather," Mrs. Godbey fretted, "and us with a leaky wagon-sheet. How 'bout—"

"Yes'm," Wat sighed, "you all can sleep in the house. You womenfolks take the bed. Me'n' Mr. Godbey will make out in the leanto. May's well cook your chuck in the kitchen, too."

Quicker than a hungry man can peel an onion, Mrs. Godbey was spouting orders like a trail boss. Godbey was to put up the team, fetch wood and water. Olga was to skedaddle right into the kitchen, start a fire, get a kettle on, and see could she find any grub better than was in the wagon. "Better bust up more stove wood," she told Wat. "But first get your gun and knock over some grouse, then fotch some o' them chokecherries I seen back yonder."

"Yes'm," Wat said over his shoulder as he moved off.

THE SUPPER smelled good and really was good, as Mrs. Godbey pointed out to Wat, declaring it to be but a sample of what Olga could do if she ever got a kitchen of her own; and adding that a man who eats his own cooking for long is bound to get a stomach complaint.

"Don't you get lonesome livin' this-a-way?" Godbey asked.

Keeping his head averted lest that terrifyingly pretty Olga start batting her eyes at him again and give him the shakes, Wat said that what with broncs to gentle, cows to pull out of bog holes, and fences to mend, he had no time to get lonesome. "And most every Sunday Pete Kirby comes out. Me'n Pete soldiered together in Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders down 'round Santiago. Pete used to be a top ranch hand, but now he keeps store in Chimney Rock. He packs me out smokin' and grub, then stays all day and we try to best each other at ropin' calves or shootin' or pitchin' horseshoes."

"Rivals, sort of," Olga said.

Wat nodded. "Always nip an' tuck and no holts barred."

Temporarily, at least, the conversation seemed to be off thin ice. Wat's insides ceased to chouse around, and he settled down to enjoy his fried prairie chicken and soda biscuits and chokecherry pie.

Godbey was telling of his former business in Ogallala, a combination of furniture selling and undertaking. In the good old days—with fancy gals spending lavishly, and several killings a week among the menfolks—trade had been good in both lines. But as the town slowed down Godbey's business fell off. Finally, plumb discouraged, they'd packed up and were now hunting a place with the whiskers still on, a town with an indifferent marshal and preferably no doctor at all. They planned to take a look at Scott's Bluff, and if that seemed too well ordered, to trail on up to Deadwood.

"Olga don't wanna go," Mrs. Godbey broke in. "Afore her ma'n' pa was took by tick fever she lived on a ranch a long wolf howl from nowhere. She never did like towns. She still pines fer the country."

"Yes'm, but I'll bet she'll like Deadwood," Wat said, because Deadwood was a long way off. "Them Black Hills is prettier than around Scott's Bluff, and they're full an' runnin' over with lively people. The towns has got good stores, there's dances all the time, and a young sagehen gets a lot of attention from them soldiers at Fort Meade."

"Bah!" Olga scoffed. "I like wearin' pants and ridin' hosses and workin' cattle. I like peace and quiet, save fer coyotes yippin' at night."

"What's more," Mrs. Godbey declared, "a healthy girl like her is bound to marry and keep the stork a-flyin', and a ranch is the place to raise kids."

Wat's face went red as a Hereford's hide, and he strangled on his coffee. Olga giggled and supper was over.

HOUR after hour that night Wat lay hearing the rain and Godbey's wheezing. But it was neither of these, nor the shakedown bed on the leanto floor that kept him awake. It was worry. It was plain as a heifer's hips that the Godbeys and Olga craved to part company and had picked on him as the way out. He had to admit that did a man want a wife this Olga would fill the bill. She was handsome as a heart flush and smelled like fresh-cut prairie hay. With her red cheeks, and hair the color of a new throw-rope, she made him feel like an extra-dark and dirty razorback hog, dogged if she didn't.

But while a man could be prideful of her she'd be a blamed nuisance. She'd be wanting to go to town every Saturday and buy stuff, and she'd be batting those blue eyes at every jigger in pants who wasn't a downright mossyhorn. She'd want all manner of shapin' up done around the house. And kids—great snakes! The very thought of the hell they'd raise made him shake like a dude hunter aiming at his first elk. He sure did wish for sunup and time for the Godbeys to pull freight. Maybe, doggone it, he'd better snake out right now and stay hid in the hills till they'd. . . .

"Don't fidget so!" Godbey protested sleepily. "You got ticks?"

With a grunt Wat lay back and resolved to keep quiet as a dead weasel till Godbey dozed off again. Wat had endured ticks, and ivy poisoning as well, but neither had upset him like now. His Ma, who'd been wise as a treeful of owls, had always said that the worth of a thing is best known by the want of it, and he saw now that was the brass-bound truth. If he ever did get peace and quiet once more he sure would appreciate it.

Not till the first light showed did Godbey seem to sleep soundly again. Then, rising

stealthily, Wat got into his clothes. Carrying his boots, and tense as a fiddle string, he was just catfooting through the kitchen when he heard the planks in the bedroom floor creak. The door opened, and in bulged Mrs. Godbey bearing a lighted lamp. "Well!" she bellowed. "You're jest in time to start the fire."

"Yes'm," Wat groaned, knowing he was licked.

AFTER he'd got the busted old stove going, he packed water from the river, washed at the bench outside, then came back into the kitchen. Dogged if Olga wasn't fooling with his Ma's old sewing machine. "She's good at makin' stuff," Mrs. Godbey announced, turning from the stove and glaring at Wat's mail-order shirt. "Jest give 'er some cloth an' thread an' buttons—"

"Yes'm," Wat said. "It's startin' to fair up. You'll have a good day for travelin'."

"It jest came to mind that this is Sunday," Godbey yelled from the leanto. "We'd best lay over and rest."

Too polite to order them out, Wat was up against a knot. "Suit yourselves," he said weakly, slumping onto the nearest chair. "I'm a-goin' fishin', but—"

"Bosh!" Olga scoffed. "Fish in this river is unlikely as frost down in Yuma, and was there any they wouldn't bite after this rain."

"That's right," Godbey yawned, shambling in.

Outside, a horse nickered, and a lusty voice called, "Hi, Wat!"

"Pete Kirby," Wat said, just before a big redheaded, full-of-sap jasper exploded into the room.

"Meet the Godbeys and Miss Otway," Wat told him.

"I'm a son-of-a-gun," Pete said, grinning at Olga.

"You're an early riser, too," she shot back quick as a grass fire.

"Shucks, I ain't been to bed." With even more than the usual swagger Pete high-heeled across the room and sat down beside her. "Been a-dancin' all night, and would be there yet had any o' the gals looked like you."

Blushing prettily, Olga was fiddling with a fold of her calico dress.

"Understand you're a storekeeper," Mrs. Godbey remarked, setting another place at the table.

Pete was smoothing down his scalp-lock. "Am so," he smirked, puffing his rim-fire cigar and neglecting to explain that he was only the clerk.

Doggone chump's a-sawin' off a job on hisself, Wat snickered silently, glad to no longer be the center of interest. That pint-sized she-wolf just as leave latch onto a store clerk as a rancher, and they'll have him throwed and hog-tied in no time.

Starting right then nobody paid Wat any heed at all. After breakfast he wandered aimlessly about like a pony with the bridle off. He eyed a pack saddle in need of repair, and decided to let it go till another day. Entering the little sod-roofed barn near the river he began to tidy up some lash ropes that had fallen off their pegs to the floor. Through the open window he could see that the Godbeys had brought out chairs from the kitchen and were taking their ease by the shady side of the house. Olga and Pete were strolling around, pretending interest in the ponies in the pasture, but doing a lot of giggling and scuffling the while. Finally they headed for the river. As they passed the barn, Wat caught Pete's eye and beckoned him inside. Reluctantly Pete let go of Olga's arm and muttered something to her. She went on and he turned into the barn.

"Listen, you jughead," Wat growled, "my Pa used to say that man's the only animal that can be skinned twice. I should think, after gettin' so snarled up with that gal in Santiago that it most took General Pecos Bill Shafter hisself to get you clear, you'd see what this man-hunter—"

"Aw, you're jealous," Pete jeered, cocky as a bull going through a brush fence. "She's—"

"Oh, goodness me! Help!" The urgent behest was followed by a splash.

Wat and Pete stuck their heads out the window. Olga was floundering in the blackish water, making more ruckus than a bronc getting its first shoes tacked on.

"Quit gawpin' and fotch 'er out!" Hav-

ing risen from her chair Mrs. Godbey was glaring at the boys, but Godbey had only turned his head to see how his niece was doing.

PETE was trying to get started to the rescue, but Wat had a grip on his arm. "Just a woman's trick," he warned. "She yelped first and splashed after. That ain't swimmin' water and she won't drown."

"But maybe there's quicksand!" With a jerk Pete freed himself and lit out like a glory-bound bat.

His competitive spirit aroused, Wat followed. He'd have got there first, too, only his pants caught on a barb as he was ducking through the fence. By the time he'd unpinned himself and reached the water's edge, Pete was wading out with Olga in his arms. Both were dripping like muskrats, and Olga's flimsy dress was stuck to her like a honkytonk dancer's tights.

Wat was all bowed up, mad at himself for getting hung on the fence, mad at Olga for her snide trick. And dogged if he wasn't mad at Pete as well for seeming to enjoy it all, for squeezing her up a heap tighter than necessary. "Put 'er down!" he panted, now that Pete had sloshed out onto the muddy bank.

"No can do," Pete said with a grin and a wink. "You couldn't chop 'er loose with an axe."

Nor could Wat sock Pete's smirk without maybe hitting Olga, who really was hanging on like an Injun to a whiskey jug. But as Pete passed him Wat grabbed the back of Pete's open collar and jabbed his knee into the small of Pete's back. He yanked the collar. Pete cussed and dropped Olga, who lit with a screech.

That kicked the lid off. Quick as a flee can hop, she was on her feet and madder than a bear in springtime. "You big lout!" she stormed, but Wat didn't hear the rest because Pete had whirled and fetched him a clip that knocked him tail-over-brisket into the roiled river.

Spluttering, he scrambled up, only to find Pete coming right in after him. Lowering his head Wat butted like a bull. Pete's arms were flailing, but they failed to connect with Wat's head, and Pete caught it full in the middle.

"Whuff!" he gasped, and the two fell snarled together. Getting his head up, Wat spouted water. He was squatting on Pete's shoulders, and down yonder in the ooze Pete was heaving about like a bogged steer.

"Leave 'im up! He'll drown!" Both women were yelling and jumping about as though fighting hornets. Considerably cooled, now, Wat knew they were right. Getting off Pete, he waded ashore.

He'd no more than stepped from the water when Pete, sizzling like grease on a hot griddle, leaped on his back. As Wat staggered under the impact, Pete lost his hold and fell, and when he jumped up Wat whanged him smack-dab on the nose. It squashed like a frost-bitten tomato.

Olga loosed a squeal.

"My land!" Mrs. Godbey said.

Godbey guffawed, and shot a stream of tobacco juice into the river.

With soaked bandanna clapped to his face Pete—he was a sight to pop your eyeballs—was heading for the house.

"You had no call to do that!" Olga's temper had exploded like the joints of bluestem grass in a prairie fire. "You—"

"Aw, hobble your lip!" Wat panted, swiping wet hair from his eyes. "If it hadn't been for your monkeyshines—"

"Never mind, we'll dust along!" she snapped, aiming her chin skyward and starting off.

"Now, dearie, don't be so mean spoke an' uppity," Mrs. Godbey cautioned, catching her sleeve. "You know very well you was a-tryin' to jealous Mr. Deerwester and you done so."

"Not me!" Wat declared, tucking in his shirt tail. "She's a—"

"And you ought to be playin' with a string o' spools!" Olga jerked free of Mrs. Godbey's hand. "We're leavin' out right now. We'll go on to town where poor Mr. Kirby—"

"Keno! And don't look back one time!" Wat stormed, meaning that to include poor Mr. Kirby who had slapped the saddle on his roan and was punching a rapid hole in the atmosphere toward town and a doctor to patch his damaged beak.

WORN and weary as a fresh-branded calf, Wat dumped the water out of his boots, then hunkered down and listened to the wrangling and clatter as the Godbeys hitched up to leave. When, at last, their wagon had rattled off toward Chimney Rock, he slouched wetly to the house that was his own once more.

How quiet and peaceful it was. Taking his time, he shaved and got into dry clothes. And dogged if he could see where Mrs. Godbey had found any reason to criticize his ability as a housekeeper. Things were in plenty good shape—plenty. Near noon he built a fire and mixed a batch of biscuits. "Huh, thought to jealous me, did she?" he muttered, shoving them into the oven.

He fried bacon and boiled coffee; and all the while he was thinking how still it was, still as a meeting-house on a Monday. Too doggone still, maybe, with nary a sound save for the scurry of a packrat.

And the grub, when it was ready, didn't seem too good, either. The bacon was burned black, each biscuit was heavy as a dead bear, and the Arbuckle's would have tanned a hide. By this time, Wat reflected morosely ,that fool Olga will be makin' a to-do over Pete's hurts, and Pete's a sucker for sympathy. There's a preacher handy to marry 'em, and if I don't—

Jumping up from the table he clapped on his hat and legged it for the barn. Snatching the rope off his saddle, he ducked through the pasture fence and began shaking out a loop. "Come on, you Teddy!" he yelled, dabbing it on a cornered buckskin. "We're a-goin' after Olga. A man never knows what he wants till— Rattle your hocks, now!"

KNOW YOUR WEST

1. Give two slang names for the saddle horn, for which a bronc-rider reaches to avoid being thrown.

2. There's a Caribou National Forest in Idaho and Wyoming. Are there any wild caribou in it?

3. Purebred Hereford cattle must be red with white faces; polled Angus, black. In what beef breed may the color vary considerably, even among purebreds?

4. Although perhaps none as spectacular as Niagara, there are a number of notable waterfalls in the West. Name at least one.

5. How's your cow country Spanish? One Western American word will satisfacterily translate all the following expressions: *Cómo le va? Cómo está? Cómo le pasa? Qué tal?*

6. Probably the world's largest mineral hot springs, with a flow of 18,600,000 gallons a day, are at Thermopolis, in what state?

7. When a Westerner "grubstakes" a prospector, what does he do?

8. Texas trail herds used to hit the Platte River in Nebraska and follow its north fork upstream—though not clear to its head — to reach northwestern ranges. In what state does the North Platte actually head?

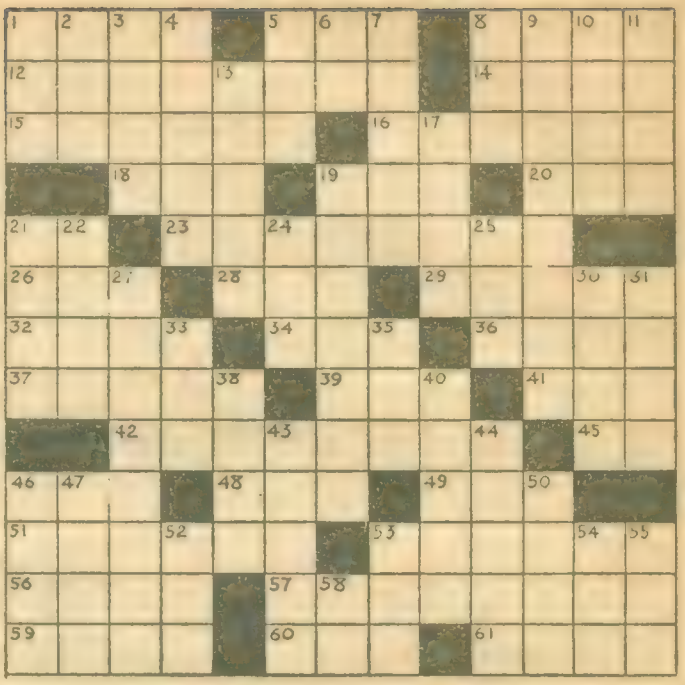
9. When an old-time cowpuncher said he "sweated out the winter on a hay ranch," what did he mean?

10. Bacone University, for Indians only, is loated at Muskogee, in what state?

——Rattlesnake Robert

You will find the answers to these questions on page 111. Score yourself 2 points for each question you answer correctly. 20 is a perfect score. If your total score is anywhere from 16 to 20, you're well acquainted with the customs and history of the cow country. If your total score is anywhere from 8 to 14, you will have things to learn. If you're below 8, better get busy polishing up your knowledge of the West.

THE WESTERNERS' CROSSWORD PUZZLE



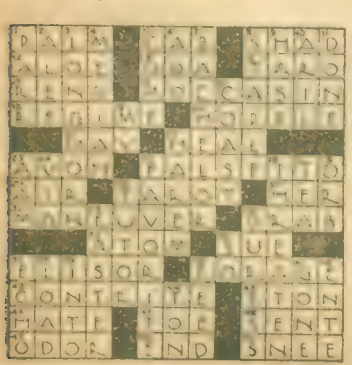
The solution to this puzzle will appear in the next issue

ACROSS

1. Be gone!
5. Melody
8. To give forth
12. Golden horse
14. Load
15. Lessened
16. Indian warriors
18. Occupied a chair
19. ——Grande
20. To dine
21. Pronoun
23. Pale purple
26. Shoshonean Indian
28. Youth
29. To oust
32. Dwarf
34. To attempt
36. To reverberate
37. Supple
39. Organ of hearing
41. To know
42. Rancher
45. Pronoun
46. Counter
48. Aeriform substance
49. To seize
51. Speaker
53. To approach
56. Baked clay
57. To keep sacred
59. Hearty
60. Pacifier
61. Dash

DOWN

1. Mineral spring
2. Taxi
3. Too bad
4. Whole
5. To assist
6. Not out
7. Harbinger of spring
8. Highest note
9. Unbranded calf
10. Notion
11. Examination
13. Character
17. Went on horseback
19. Reparation
21. To cast
22. Sewing case
24. Large tank
25. Night before
27. To charm
30. To masticate
31. Pitch
33. Article
35. Sweet potato
38. Hence
40. Stockfarm
43. Ventures
44. Mother-of-pearl
46. The two
47. Operatic solo
50. To seethe
52. Golf mound
53. Venomous serpent
54. E. Indian sheep
55. Decade
58. Negative.



Solution to First May Puzzle

Pass the Peace Pipe

By William Freeman Hough

My head feels like a barrel and my eyes like branding irons

THE LIVING ROOM of the Craig ranch house is as sacred as a medicine man's teepee, believe me. The first day I went to work on the Flying C, I was informed that said room was reserved for Gil Craig and his immediate family, which consists of Gil himself and Muggins.

Well, I wasn't curious; I didn't give a hang about the room or the house itself, only I get to wondering why a sweet little gal like Muggins can spend so much time there. Unless, of course, Gil orders her to. Gil is plumb positive with his orders.

But the night I get home from town with the paper box and the message I barge right into the sanctum sanctorum. I figured it is important enough to break the hard-and-fast rule. But it seems that what I think is important doesn't let down the bars.

Muggins, who is curled up on a couch like a kitten, observes my abrupt entrance with wide and alarmed eyes. She draws in a quick breath and shoots a glance at her pa who is sitting in a big chair near the fireplace. Then she tenses up like she's expecting an explosion.

"Well?"

The sound comes from deep in Gil Craig's throat. He speaks around the butt of a cigar tucked in his mouth, the smoke from which curls up around his bushy brows like a signal in the sage. He lowers his Breeders' Gazette and fixes me with his small, hard eyes.

"Feeling fine," I says cheerfully, and

ONE SURE way to prove you're not an accomplice to a kidnapping is just to get abducted yourself

tosses the box to the couch beside Muggins. I stand there, legs apart, watching light from the lamp shade crystals dance across Gil's dished face. His jaw has jutted out and froze in the shape of an anvil. And just as hard.

"What's the idea of barging in here?" he demands. "You've been told that this place is—"

"Yeah, yeah," I butts in. "I should have taken it up with my congressman, I suppose, but I figured that'd take too long." I points to the box on the couch. "It's a rodeo costume for Muggins."

"What?" he snorts and stands up on legs what could easily be under a grand piano.

"And there's a message goes with it," I adds. "The guy that gave me the box said to tell you that Muggins has been chosen for one of the rodeo queen's attendants."

Gil Craig heaves his cigar into the fireplace and kicks the Breeders' Gazette right in the belly of the bull whose picture is on the cover of it. "You blasted fool!" he roars. "Don't you know better than to—"

"I don't know a thing but what I've been told," I breaks in.

He stands there sucking his breath in and out, staring at me like I was something that had just crawled out from under a rock. I've been told that Gil Craig has such moments, but in the thirty days I've worked for him I've seen no signs of 'em up to now.

But I've been around some and I'm not afraid of Gil Craig and his storms. I shift my glance to Muggins who is running one small hand over the box, her face just a shade wistful.

"So you're feeling fine," jeers her pa. "Well, you'd better cherish the memory of it, for I'm about to take you apart."

"You and who else?" I asks, glancing about the room which is hung heavy with Navaho rugs and such like. They gave the place a dull, heavy appearance, even though it was all rich and befitting the richest rancher in those parts. Some wigwam, believe me.

Craig gathers his legs under him like a snake, coiling for the strike; then he sort of relaxes to a bit of curiosity. "Who gave you that box?" he demands.

"I don't know the gent," I says. "I'm not familiar with the characters in these parts. I reckoned he was a member of the rodeo committee."

"No doubt!" he jeers. "And making another pass at me for my favor. Why, listen, you saddle-bumping bum, my Muggins should be the queen of that shindig if anything, only I wouldn't let her have any part in the silly affair. Rodeos are a waste of time and money. But to offer her an attendant's part—" He chokes up and waves his fists.

I'm willing to admit that Muggins should be the queen; she has anything beat in this country for looks. But, as I stand there watching Craig's convulsion, it comes to me that I've never heard of Muggins even going in to Barstow on a Saturday. Craig himself seldom goes to town.

"The flat-footed fools!" he roars getting his breath back. "The sneaking money-snatchers! Why, I got a notion to—"

MUGGINS stands up, lifting the box with her. "Dad," she says soothingly, "couldn't you let me do it just this once?"

"What?" he gasps. "You—you want to play second fiddle to some two-bit rancher's daughter?"

"I'd like to ride in the parade at least," she declares and opens the box to reveal a white silk blouse, a white skirt with leather fringes and a white Stetson hat.

Craig snatches the blouse from her hands and holds it up to the light. "By the great Judas priest!" he rasps. "They even had the nerve to send you out the clothes!"

"Look," I says. "What's the harm in it? Why not let Muggins have a little fun for once!"

He starts choking again, balls up the silk blouse and throws it at me. "Get out!" he roars. "Get out of here before—"

Muggins faces him. "Dad! Please. Must you always rant this way? I want to do it."

Now he stares at her, his jaw jutted out far enough for a chicken roost. "What's come over you?" he bawls. "Don't I give you everything you need and want?"

"You could give me this one chance to ride in the parade," she returns.

"No! Never! That bunch of Barstow bunglers are just trying to wangle me into their silly civic affairs. I've no time for it. I won't be sucked in by my daughter riding in some fool parade."

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" I snorts, plenty disgusted.

It brings his attention back to me. "You, Burke, have got a lot of crust to come in here this way. A lot of crust."

"Cut yourself a slice," I suggests. "I hear you're so fond of dough."

He chokes and splutters. "You're fired, Burke. As of now!"

"You're reading my mind," I snaps back at him. "Thirty days is enough for me on this spread. The only clean thing here is Muggins, and you're snuffing her out like a candle. You're nothing but a tight-fisted bully with no more heart in you than a turnip. Put that on the back of your black tongue and swallow it."

His teeth click like he's just missed a bite at the back of my neck. "Muggins," he grits, "go to your room while I attend to this cheap rooster."

"You hadn't better, Dad," she tells him in a low voice.

"Do as I say!" he barks.

"Go ahead, Muggins," I says nodding toward a door, "but take a good look at your pa first, for if he lays a hand on me I'll sure turn him every which way but loose."

She hands me the box containing the riding skirt and hat. "Thanks just the same, Steve," she murmurs. "And good luck."

When she's gone I say, "Start your fight, Craig. I'll donate the month's pay you owe me just to get my hands on your hulk."

Maybe it's the first time he's ever been crossed by one of his own hands. His face gets as black as the floor he's standing on. But through his mad creeps a trickle of sense. After all, I'm no pigmy. I haven't sat around letting my muscles get soft while I figured out how to pinch another penny. Also, I'm a good twenty-five years younger than he is.

"Oh, get th'hell out of here," he grunts. "You was just an errand boy after all."

"Have it your way," I says. "But someday you're going to wake up to find your pretty little bird roosting in some other nest."

I back out the door carrying the rodeo duds, step off the porch into the dark and brush into a body. I coil to swing but a voice hisses in my ear, "It's Pete Stover!"

Well, me and the ranch handyman cross the yard to the bunkhouse. Pete strikes a match to a wall lamp and stands there admiring me openly.

"I saw you go into the house," he says in a husky voice, "and I just had to—to—"

"You figured on catching me as I came out, piece by piece, huh?"

PETE'S mouth opens and closes again. His chin is quivering like it does a lot of the time when he's excited. He's a gangling guy what used to work with a traveling rodeo show, but after a dozen years of hard bumps he can't take it anymore. Not being fit for a full job on the ranch, Craig hires him as a sort of chore boy, paying him no more than practically peanuts.

"What'd you go in there for?" he asks after a bit.

I start throwing a hitch over my bedroll. Jerking my head toward the box of female rodeo clothes I tell him why I've just bearded the lion in his den.

"Gee!" says Pete. "Gee, I bet Muggins would of liked that. She never gets to go anywhere."

"Yeah, I've noticed that in the month I've been here. Never rides more'n half a mile from the house at one time. I don't get it, Pete."

Pete peers out the door and says softly, "He's afraid she'll meet up with some fella what'll want to marry her."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" I asks.

"For his money, Gil thinks."

"Nuts! I'd like to marry Muggins, and I don't want any part of Craig's moolah." I take a final hitch on the bedroll. "She'll kick over the traces someday; that girl's got spirit."

"Yeah?" he says, almost hopeless. "So far she seems plenty subdued to me." He eyes me sadly, and Pete Stover is sure one gent who can look sad. He's tall and stooped, and there's bags under his bleary

eyes; he looks like misfortune itself, draped in dirty pants and shirt.

"Too bad," he murmurs. "Muggins should ought to see a rodeo once—anyhow, ride in the parade." Then his chin begins to quiver like it does when a thought excites him. "S-s-say, Steve," he gulps, "how about leavin' these rodeo duds here with me?"

"What's the pitch?" I ask him.

"Well, mebbe, like you said, Muggins will kick over the traces and go anyhow. I could slip her the clothes, see? She might go later t'night. I'd sure like to help her."

"And get your scalp hung in that teepee yonder?"

"It might be worth it," he declares. "It gripes me to see Muggins wiltin' away."

I stares at him and shakes my head. "No soap," I tell him. "I got a better idea."

"You mean you'll take her?" he husks anxiously.

"That's something you should know nothing about, Pete."

HE STARES after me as I ride off through the darkness. But he don't see me stop down at the end of the cottonwood lane, unfork and come back to the south side of the house. I creep along past the lights of the living room, where Gil Craig is pacing up and down, and go on to the west wing. Stopping before an open window I calls softly, "Muggins?" There's no answer. I call again and still there's no reply from the dark room. While I'm standing there wondering what to do next, I hear a soft "Ps-s-st," behind me. I walk toward the sound.

"I've been waiting for you down at the end of the lane, Steve," whispers Muggins. "Did you fetch the outfit with you?"

I drape my arm across her shoulders and push her away from the side of the house. "It's with my horse," I tell her. "You going in with me?"

"I sure am," she says. "Ever since I heard of the rodeo I've wanted to see it. I'm not going to lose this chance to ride in the parade. It was mighty nice of them to ask me to be a princess."

"Yeah, but the cost may come a little high."

Her shoulders shrug under my arm. "That's another day. Whatever Dad does about it I can afford."

"I don't get that man," I mutter. "He don't live natural and he won't let you do much more than breathe."

"He has his reasons, I suppose," she says. "Here's my horse."

"You fetched a mount?" I says.

"I didn't go to my room when Dad ordered me to, Steve. I went to the barn and saddled my pony."

Muggins has kicked over the traces, sure enough, and I can almost feel a storm gathering on the horizon. Riding along with her I get to thinking how fine it would be if she never had to go back to the ranch. And I also get to thinking what a wonderful chance it is for me to do something about it. I ain't exactly broke; I'm young and can work hard. Others have made a start in life with less.

"Muggins," I says, clearing my throat. "you haven't known me very long, but if I was to tell you that I—well, that I think a lot about you—"

"Yes?" she asks softly.

"Well, it gripes me to see you penned up this way and—"

"I don't need pity, Steve," she breaks in, and I see that I've taken the wrong trail right at the start.

"All right," I says. "What do you need?"

She doesn't hesitate. "A little understanding, Steve, and a little love."

"You got it!" I declare. "Not a little of either, but a whole heart full of it."

"Oh, Steve!" she cries, and I find there's not much space between her horse and mine. Maybe it's not strange that neither of us think of Gil Craig all the rest of the way into Barstow.

Arriving in town, we leave the horses at the barn and go down the street to the hotel. Since the rodeo opens the next day the place is plenty crowded, but I wangle a room for Muggins and a cot in the hall for myself. Our goodnight there in the hall above the lobby is short and sweet, and as I watch her pass on down to the door of her room, the lamplight glinting on her mahogony-colored hair, I think that I am

the luckiest guy in the world. With which I lie down on the cot to entertain some mighty pleasant dreams.

My awakening the next morning is somewhat on the rude side. I open my eyes to find Gil Craig standing over me, his face blacker than the inside of a dead cow. His hands are clenched and it is plain to see that massacre is something he's fondest of. "Where's Muggins?" he snaps at me.

I twists off the cot and stands up. It's daylight but the lamp is still burning in the hallway. "The governor gave her a parole," I cracks.

"Wise guy, huh?" he snarls and I have to beat off the hand he reaches out at me.

"Did you try looking in her hotel room?" I inquires.

"She ain't there. Only her old clothes."

"That's easy," I says. "She must have put on the white outfit and gone out to join the parade."

"That doesn't come off for two hours yet." He wets his lips. "Her horse is still in the barn, so she hasn't gone back to the ranch."

I KICK the other fifty percent of sleep out of my head and begin to think, and as I do so I can't help but smile. Muggins has suspected that her pa will come boiling to town to get her, so she's slipped out early to hide until parade time. I feel good enough about it to tell him so.

"Burke," he grits through his teeth, "you're at the bottom of this. You sneaked her off the ranch last night and brought her to town."

"So that's a crime?" I jeers.

"You'll think it is before I'm through with you. If anything happens to Muggins—"

"She's not a babe in arms," I breaks in. "What could happen to her except an hour of pleasure?"

"Plenty could happen," he says. "Plenty!" And I see a flicker of fear come into his eyes. Then I am surprised to see him whirl about and go tramping back down the stairs. I expected him to get tough with me.

But I am more surprised later on that morning as I watch the parade come down Barstow's main street. A mounted band is leading the parade, and after it comes the queen and her attendants, all mounted on white horses, wearing white outfits and looking very sweet, indeed. But the girl who can knock 'em all for a row of petunias when it comes to looks isn't there. Right then the parade is nothing more'n a funeral procession for me. I beat it down to the

"What do you mean two tickets? He's only four years old!"

livery barn and find Gil Craig pacing up and down like a bull with a new ring in its nose. Muggins' pony is still in the stall.

"She never showed up," raps Craig at me.

"I've bought a load of that already," I says. "I don't get it!"

He sticks his jaw out at me and says, "Come on, Burke. We're going to find out about that invitation from the committee."

Well, the girl in charge of the rodeo office doesn't know a thing about it. So far as the record can show, Muggins has never been asked to participate in the parade. Of course, she admits, there might have been some last minute changes. . . .

A white ring builds up around Gil Craig's jutting jaw. "It's a phoney!" he snarls.

"Aw, there must be some mistake," I protests. "The guy gave me the costume and said to tell Muggins—"

"And you fell for it," he bawls.

"I should have maybe kicked the guy in the teeth?" I inquires. "How was I to know the deal was screwy, if it is?"

"If what I think has happened I'll choke the life out of you, Burke!" he promises.

"So what are you thinking?"

"That she's been kidnapped!"

"So's your Aunt Chovie," I jeer.

CRAIG'S lips flutter a little. "Why do you think I've kept her so close to home all the time? Threats, that's why. I've had threats that she'd be kidnapped?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Look," he begins, then stops. A rider is coming down the street, his neck swinging from side to side as though he's looking for somebody. He is. It is Pete Stover. He sees us there in front of the rodeo office and pulls up.

"Oh, boss," he quivers, sliding out of the saddle. "I f-found this tacked to the door about an hour ago." He hands a piece of paper to Craig. The rancher reads it through and his big knees sort of sag. I grab the paper out of his hand and runs a quick eye over the scrawl on it.

If Muggins is worth $5000.00 to you, have that amount tied to the saddle of her horse and leave the animal in the cottonwood grove twelve miles east of town at midnight. Don't stick around the grove and don't try to set a trap. We mean business.

It wasn't signed, of course.

"I told you," husks Craig. "I'm going to the sheriff with this."

"You'd take that chance? For a lousy five thousand bucks?"

"It—it ain't the money," he snivels. "I want Muggins back."

"Then don't call in the law. Use your head for a change. You've got until midnight, anyhow."

"S-steve is right, Gil," stutters Pete Stover. "Think it over. Pull the wrong picket pin now and you're in a jam."

"What do you think I'm in now?" wails the rancher. "Burke, I could kill you for getting us into this!"

"Keep noble," I warn him. "Naturally I didn't savvy the deal. But since I had a hand in it, I'll play out the string. Besides, Muggins means as much or more to me that she does to you."

"What?" he coyotes.

"Stick around here and think it over," I suggests. "Me, I'm going on the prowl."

I leave him there and go back to the hotel, and my own think tank is plenty busy. Five thousand bucks isn't much to ask of a man who could easily pay ten times that much. It had been a slick way of getting Muggins off the ranch, but beyond that the thing had a sort of amateur smell to it. Sort of a local job I mean.

I went to Muggins' room at the hotel and found her old clothes tossed on the bed. I deduce from this that whoever took her away gave the excuse of readying her for the parade. It could have been the guy that gave me the white costume, and I try to remember what he looked like. If it was him, and it seemed likely, where would he hide her from now until midnight? Not out at the cottonwood grove, that's a cinch. Barstow isn't such a big town, so if she's stashed in some deserted building it shouldn't be too tough to locate it.

Out on the street again I aim for the rodeo grounds. The old building idea doesn't appeal to me so much. Even an

amateur would expect a search. Maybe my best bet is to inquire around to see if a car has left town in a hurry.

After a couple of inquiries I discard the idea. Who would notice a car leaving town during a rodeo show? So I drift back past the arena to a small trailer camp near the town park and sit down on a bench to think. The plainest thing to me is that I'm not doing so good. I push my mental cog wheels back over the whole deal, step by step, and arrive exactly where I still am. There's not much to go by, for sure.

WHILE I'm sitting on the bench, I smoke a whole pack of cigarettes and mark the time that's left. Sure, Craig can kick through with the money and, if the job isn't bungled, get Muggins back safe. But where does that leave me? I'm in this thing up to my ears, not only with Craig but with Muggins. It just doesn't look so good for me.

In time the show in the arena is over and folks begin drifting back up town. Those that pass me must have guessed how saggy I felt. Like maybe a contestant that'd been eliminated early in the game. I gave back look for look, hoping maybe I'd recognize the guy who's slipped me the costume for Muggins. That was a fat chance, huh?

There's long shadows in the trailer park when I heaves up off the bench and prepares to admit that I am stumped. Lights begin to blink in the trailers stashed about, and there's a smell of cooking on the air. All quite homey and happy, which don't suck the lemon out of my heart. I leans down to pick up one of my cigarette stubs for a new light on it, and it's then I see something I should have noticed hours before—a bit of white on the trunk of a tree not six feet from the bench where I have been sitting. Caught in the bark of that tree is a short piece of white leather, like the fringe from the skirt of a rodeo costume.

It is then I notice that of all the trailers too, with some faded letters printed on the side of it. I drift that way, letting the thing build up in me. I circle the trailer once and come to a pause at the rear where a set of steps leads up to the door. I study that door a minute, thinking out an excuse in case I'm wrong. Then I put a boot on the lower step and start up. It was at that second that something hard conked me behind the right ear and I feel myself falling into a black well.

When I struggle back up out of the well I find that my reasoning is some impaired. Why am I jouncing around like a pea in a pail? My head feels like barrel, and my eyes burn like a branding iron. One little light keeps dancing around like a toy headlight. Slowly it comes back to me—I'm in the trailer, and it is moving, but rapidly. I am on the floor beside a bunk on which is a white bundle. The bundle is Muggins, tied hand and foot and with a gag in her mouth. At the foot of the bunk is a guy with a gun leveled on my wishbone. The one little light in the trailer steadies, and I recognize him as the man who gave me the costume and the message.

"Now we're getting somewhere," I mutter.

"Take it easy, Burke," says the guy with the gun. "I don't want to shoot you if I can help it."

"Greetings," I says, sitting up and grabbing my head with both hands. I sit that way until things clear up a little, then I twist around and reach for the rope around Muggins' ankles.

"Leave it alone," snaps the guy. "Turn around and sit still."

"Nuts!" I says, and start working on the knot.

"I don't want to shoot you, Burke, but by the—"

"You're in a rut. You said that before."

He leans forward to poke the gun at me and, though it wavered some, it didn't look good there about a foot from my nose. Watching him out of the corner of my eye I finish the knot. The hammer on the gun clicks back and I figure I am in for a blasting when Muggins kicks up with one freed foot. Her heel catches the guy on the wrist and knocks his arm aside. I'm still fuzzy in the dome but I've enough sense to follow up the advantage. Heaving forward, I strike his legs with my shoulders and rock him back.

The kidnapper is a stocky gent, strong and getting a bit desperate. What him and

me do to the inside of that trailer during the next three-four minutes couldn't be bettered by a professional wrecking crew. While we sprawl there in the swaying aisle things begin to fall on us—pots and pans from a shelf and the chimney of a small stove. A lamp smashes to make the floor slippery.

IT'S QUITE a slugging match for a spell, until I catch him one on the button and rock him back against the wall. Down he goes to roll over and reach for the gun lying there partly under the bunk. I stamp his hand and then reach down to pick him up. I slam him back and his shoulder knocks off a little hinged window. The thing comes down over my head and sticks there like a square halo. By the time I get it off I've got a nice cut in my temple and the guy is getting to his knees. I make a hard and fast kick with my foot and that ends it. The kidnapper grunts, grabs his belly with both hands and flops over on his face. I've got enough sense left to straighten him out and tie his hands before I sag down on the bunk beside Muggins and start fumbling with the gag in her mouth.

Her first words are, "That's the old socko, Steve!" I grin at her, blood from my cut temple running down over her nice white blouse. "Get my hands loose, darling, I've got to do something for your head."

A minute later she sits up beside me, rips a sleeve off the silk blouse and binds it around my head. This done, she plants a kiss right on my lips, and my condition improves very fast. We stare down at the kidnapper and I says, "Who is the guy, Muggins?"

"I don't know for sure, Steve. He came to my hotel room early and said that he wanted to give me some details about the parade. He brought me here, tied and gagged me. I didn't learn until then that it was a kidnapping. Does Dad know about it yet?"

"Does he! He got a note demanding five thousand smackers for you, and he's fit to be tied."

"Poor Dad," she murmurs. "I've always thought those threats he spoke about were phony. . . . She lays her head against my shoulder. "It sort of makes me sick, Steve."

"Yeah, Muggins, it ain't been a happy day like you expected."

"I mean—well, the other man mixed up in this. I heard him talking with this guy and—and I recognized his voice. He's driving the car right now."

I reach down, gather up the gun from the floor and twirl the cylinder. "I got a score to settle with him," I says. "Who is it?"

The light in the trailer is very dim by now but I can see the distress in her face. "You'll be slow to believe it, Steve, but the other man is Pete Stover."

"What?" I yodel. "That lop-eared pelican? Why he— No, wait a minute!"

LIGHT begins to dawn on me. I recall how anxious Pete was to have me leave the costume with him. And it was Pete who brought the ransom note to town. How could a stranger come to the ranch and pin that note to the door without Pete seeing him? Not likely at all. No, Pete wrote the note himself and fetched it to town at the proper time. And I was dumb enough not to suspect it. I said as much to Muggins.

"Don't blame yourself, Steve," she says. "After all, who would suspect Pete Stover?"

"The guy is a good actor," I mutter. "And not so dumb as he looks. Or is he? In some ways this deal is mighty smart. In other ways it's awful stinko."

"They'd have gotten away with it but for you," she says. "What is Dad going to do about paying the ransom?"

"The last I heard he planned to bring the money to the cottonwood grove as directed. He was plenty hostile at first, but he turned rubber when he got to thinking of what might happen to you."

"Poor Dad," she says again. "I don't think people understand him at all." She looks out of the little window for a minute, watching the stars zip by overhead. "Steve," turning back to me, "what are we going to do about Pete Stover?"

"Hah!" I says, gripping the gun. "Just wait till he pulls into the cottonwood grove with this outfit! I owe that sad sack plenty

for this sock on the head, not even mentioning his plotting against you."

She nods. "I've always felt rather sorry for Pete, but apparently I was wrong."

"Yeah, he may have been hatching up this deal ever since he came to the Flying C. Wonder if we can see him up there?"

We pass to the front of the trailer, and I work open the front door. It's a close hitch between trailer and car, and we can peer right through the rear window before us. It's Pete behind the wheel, all right—you couldn't mistake those stooped shoulders and gawky neck. And just as I am about to close the door again he glances up into the rear-view mirror.

His head jerks clear around and his big mouth falls open. That brief moment of slack at the wheel is enough. The next thing I know we are off the road and into the side ditch, bouncing, swaying and creaking.

It's a couple of minutes before I could get up off the trailer floor which is pitched at a crazy angle. I pull Muggins up and we take stock. We're both battered but unbowed. Holding the gun in one hand and leading Muggins with the other, I get to the back door and out. I stash her there while I ease around to the front. The car has broken loose from the trailer and is in the ditch, but right side up. It looks like it has hit on the left side and bounced back, for the glass is all broken there. With the gun ready I advance along the ditch, but my caution is unnecessary. One look at Pete Stover, and I know my chore with him won't have to be done. Pete is lying very still with his head out the front window. The angle of his neck tells me all I need to know.

I get him into the back of the car before I go back to Muggins. "Well, that's all for Pete," I says.

She grips my arm and looks ahead through the darkness to where the cottonwood trees of the old grove kind of shimmer in the gloom. "I—I'm rather glad you didn't have to deal with him, Steve."

"To tell the truth, so am I," I says, patting her hand.

It takes me half an hour to get the car out of the ditch and the prisoner loaded in with Pete Stover. We head back for town, but slow, as the radiator is smashed and leaking.

OUR PRISONER is Sam Stover, Pete's cousin. They had worked together on the rodeo circuits until Pete couldn't take it any more. Sam is now running a relay string and not winning much. But, according to him, it was Pete who hatched up the kidnap scheme, worked out all the details. I doubt this, but it will be up to the court to decide.

We are almost to town when the headlights pick up a rider and a led horse. They pull off the road to let us pass and Muggins exclaims, "It's Dad!"

"Headed for the cottonwood grove with the five thousand bucks," I says, tramping on the brake. "Hi, there, Gil. Got something here for you."

He edges his horse up beside the car. "Oh, it's you, Burke," he rasps. "I thought you'd skipped out. . . . Hey! Muggins!"

Them two go into a clinch that lasts so long I begin to get restless. And then Muggins tells him all about it. And while she talks Gil looks first at me and then into the back of the car. He is stumped, utterly; for a while he can't even speak. At last he gets his whistle wetted up enough to say, "Burke, you son of a gun! And here all the time I've been thinking that you—" He reaches into a pocket and jabs a cigar at me. "Have one," he invites. "Have two."

"Pipe of peace?" I ask.

"Why—yeah, sure."

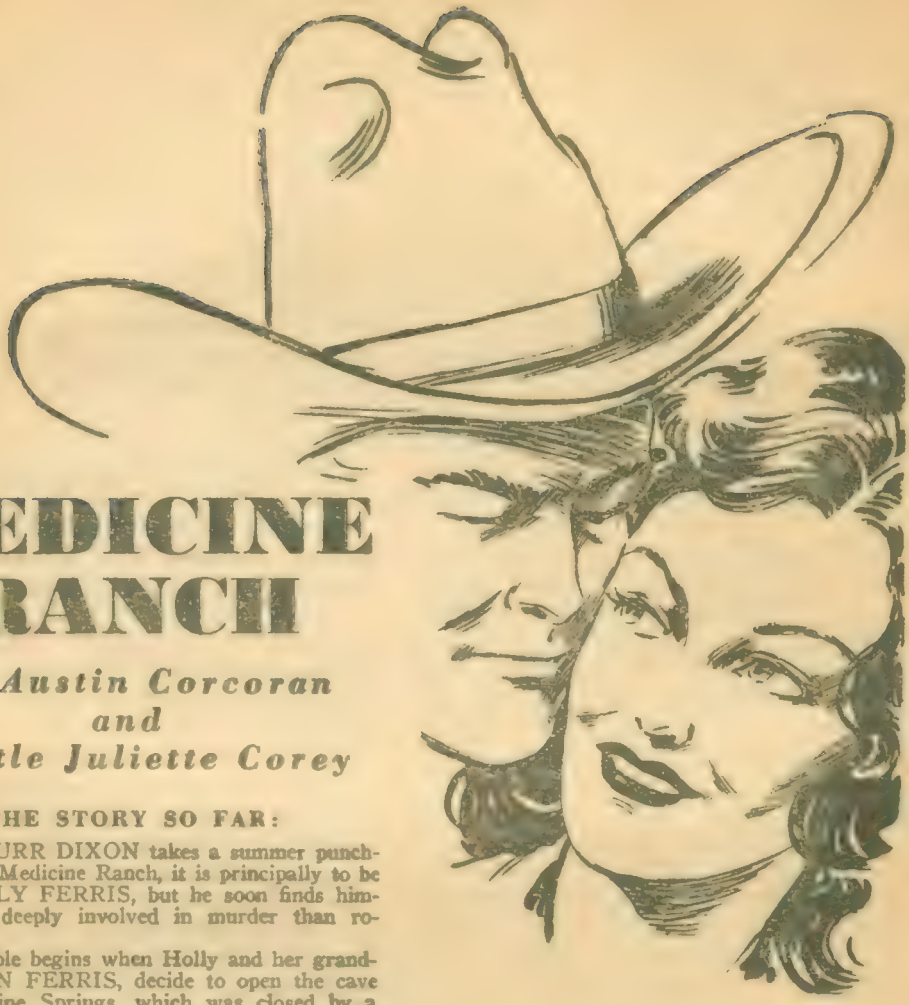
"Make the other a wedding cigar, Gil?"

Gil Craig swallows. He looks at Muggins who has moved closer to me. "I'll even go for that," he admits, "if Muggins wants it that way."

"I do, Dad. It's just got to be that way."

"Okay, kids. We'll make it a good one."

And he does. You'd be surprised how gay that wigwam out at the Flying C looks a week later when Muggins and me get married.



MEDICINE RANCH

By Austin Corcoran and Myrtle Juliette Corey

THE STORY SO FAR:

When BURR DIXON takes a summer punching job on Medicine Ranch, it is principally to be near HOLLY FERRIS, but he soon finds himself more deeply involved in murder than romance.

The trouble begins when Holly and her grandfather, BEN FERRIS, decide to open the cave near Medicine Springs, which was closed by a big storm twenty-five years before, on the same night that Ben's son, Dick, accused of a stage holdup, disappeared.

The day the cave is opened, Holly discovers a body inside. She summons her grandfather and Burr, who discover the dead man is Rufe Prettyman, one of the ranch hands. From DR. DINGLE, a house guest at the ranch, Burr learns that Prettyman had an unsavory past.

Soon after this, SILAGO NEZ, an Indian camped near the Springs is attacked. When Burr tells Holly he suspects that Dick has returned to find loot he hid in the cave, she becomes very angry and tells him she's through with him.

Burr tracks hoof prints from the Springs to a lonely cabin on the near by ranch of SENATOR CAL HENDRIX, his son PAUL, and his grandchildren, CAROLE and LES, and he finds that the horse he was tracking belonged to them.

Back at Medicine Ranch, he receives a call from the office of SHERIFF MATT SAMPSON, and soon afterward he goes to his car and drives off.

CONCLUSION

HOLLY crouched closer against the floor in the back of the car, between the right door and a cardboard carton containing extra tubes, cans of oil and a coiled rope. She made herself as small as possible, under the blanket she had pulled from the back seat. Burr was stopping before going nearly as far as she had expected. She tried to figure just where they were. She was sure they had made the turn into the county highway, then had turned again after slowing considerably.

A horde of questions had been nagging her. What if Burr and the sheriff didn't talk so she could learn anything? What if

Burr just popped into Matt's car and went on some place? Playing stowaway didn't seem so smart now. If she announced her presence the penalty might be more than the anger of the two men; it might badly disrupt their plans. She couldn't see Matt Sampson taking any woman along when he was stalking a criminal. They would probably tell her to drive Burr's car back. She would have learned nothing—simply made a fool of herself. She decided she'd walk back to the ranch before she'd show herself.

The motor was shut off. Now came the dangerous moment, when Dixon got out. If he looked into the back of the car—

She breathed more freely. He was out and had shut the door behind him, but the window was open. Cautiously freeing an ear from the blanket, she heard the crunch of his boot soles on gravel. Then he spoke. There was no reply—just a thump and a frightening sound like a moan. Then she heard a voice that was all growl. She thought it said, "That's enough!"

Holly knew that she never had been so terrified. It didn't take much imagination to guess what had happened. Writhing around, she thrust her head from beneath the blanket. With not even a car light turned on, the outside was a murky mass that seemed to press against the windows. She wriggled until she could put her face close to the window of the nearest door, with her head still hooded in the blanket. Her eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom, and she could discern objects dimly.

She saw two tall, blocky figures. She could tell that their hats were pulled low and their necks muffled by collars that turned up around them. On the ground was a dark heap she knew was Burr.

If he wasn't dead yet, he soon would be, unless she could do something to prevent it. If only she had brought a gun! Burr would have his, thrust in his belt. Holly knew that was the way he carried it.

The two men were talking, their heads close together. She could only make out a mumble. Probably they were deciding what to do with Burr's body. She could feel a scream rising in her throat, choked it back with a fist pressed tight against her lips.

One of the men stooped over Burr, seemed about to lift his body. The other checked him.

"Not yet!" Holly barely caught the hoarse whisper. "The car first. Get that set, then—" She lost the next words, but she guessed they were going to do something to Burr's car—and she was inside it!

"Wait!" the breathy growl commanded. "Have to move him so you can turn."

Holly crawled on top of the carton and got hold of the door handle beyond. It turned easily. Out she slid into the darkness, the sedan between herself and the men. Forcing herself to ease the door into the frame and move the handle slowly, she managed to fasten it with a mere squeak of the latch as it caught.

Venturing to lift her head, she peered through the two windows of the car. At first she couldn't see the men, then she saw that they had moved up beside the forward car. With a catlike dart she was around the sedan and crouched beside Burr. Thrusting one hand inside his jacket she felt with relief the slow beating of his heart. The other hand found the gun butt and tugged. It came free and she clutched it grimly. She had noticed it before and knew it was similar to her grandfather's .38, a weapon she knew how to handle.

Holly had guessed the scheme. Burr's car would be run out and parked at the edge of the road. They would damage it somehow. His body would be put on the highway, as if he had gotten out on account of his crippled car, and then been run over accidentally. However, the two men would make sure of his death by killing him with their own car. Nobody could block the plot but herself.

Fighting down her terror, she stood up, gun gripped firmly. *If you're in danger, make the first move,* she'd heard Ben Ferris say.

"Stand back, there!" she ordered, her voice loud and clear in the stillness. "Make one step this way and I'll shoot!" she threatened.

There was absolute silence. The shock of complete surprise paralyzed the two men. Then she heard them mumbling furiously. Holly stood very still, wishing she had a

flashlight, hoping they wouldn't call her bluff. There was little travel on the County road after dark. It might be an hour or so before anyone came along. She would have no way of signaling a passing car. And alone, she could not make prisoners of the two men. Not in darkness, anyhow.

Sudden panic rippled through her, but she controlled it.

"I'll give you till I count five to get into your car and slam the doors," she said. "Then swing out into that side yard, turn, and get going! If you start shooting, I'll shoot back and it'll be to kill. Now move! One . . . two . . ."

They turned as one man, the shorter of the pair flinging open the door.

"Three . . ."

He leaped inside the automobile.

"Four . . ."

The second man was on his heels.

"Five!"

The door slammed shut. They were turning, without lights. They were going!

Faintness washed over Holly. She had to fight to keep her feet, to grip the gun with her taut fingers. It couldn't be true! She couldn't have driven off two desperate killers from their victim. They would turn back . . . fight it out . . . take her by surprise.

"Dear God, no, don't let them. Help me!" she prayed, icy lips forming the words stiffly.

She must get Burr away from there as fast as she could, no matter if the other car seemed to be speeding into distance.

She bent over Dixon. He was still unconscious and limp. Her insistent calling of his name brought no response.

Darting to the car she opened a rear door. Then she laid the gun handy on the front seat.

He was tall and plenty heavy for her to manage. But Holly was amazingly strong for a girl of her height. Taking hold under his arms, she dragged him to the car. She got inside and pulled him over the narrow running board and finally onto the back seat.

Not until she managed a tricky turn out of the yard and was headed up the creek road did she breathe without effort. She didn't try to speed, though she knew every bend, every change of soil or difference of grade. They were safe. It wasn't far to the ranch.

The house was in complete darkness. Nobody knew that Holly had stolen out and hidden herself in Burr's car. She would slip in and rouse Aunt Della, who met all emergencies without fuss. Explaining this business without betraying too much to Ben Ferris was going to take delicate manipulating.

Driving close to the kitchen steps and leaving the car lights on, Holly sprang out and hurried through the house to Della's room.

"Aunt Della!" she said softly, kneeling beside the bed.

"Yes, child," she answered instantly. "What is it?" She was sitting up now. "Why, you're dressed!" she exclaimed before Holly could say anything.

"Burr Dixon has been hurt. He's outside in the car."

"My goodness! I'll come right down. Wake the doctor, but be careful not to rouse father," Della directed briskly.

Dingle got downstairs almost as soon as Holly did. "You can't kill that guy," he told her encouragingly, "and you can't keep him out of trouble, if there's any handy." He kept on talking as he got into the car and bent over Burr. Perhaps he knew how hard and anxiously her heart was beating. "Another head job," he went on cheerfully. "Good thing we have plenty of gauze and adhesive tape. Do you know, Holly, I've thought of a verse for Medicine Ranch. Something like this—

A cracked head a night,
Needs a doctor in sight."

His unusual flow of nonsense steadied her and held off a sickening reaction from the strain.

"He isn't hurt much?" she asked.

"Not seriously," Dingle returned with more gravity. "His hat kept them from cracking his skull. He'll have a headache, and it'll keep him out of trouble at least for tomorrow."

Aunt Della insisted he be put to bed in a guest room at the house, and the doctor roused Pat to help carry Dixon there. They

were laying him on the bed when Ben Ferris appeared in the doorway.

"What's all this?" he demanded.

"Father, whatever waked you!" Della exclaimed.

"You must think I'm senile that I wouldn't know the place was in a turmoil," he replied with unusual impatience. "Come, what happened?"

"I don't know, yet," Della returned with some asperity. "I'm not so curious as you. When he's properly taken care of, then I'll ask questions. All I know was that he was in his car. He went to town this evening."

"And how did he get in that condition?" Ferris demanded.

"I brought him," Holly spoke up bravely.

"You did!" her grandfather exclaimed, astounded.

"Yes," she said, clasping her hands around his arm and rubbing a cheek affectionately against his shoulder. "Don't scold, gramps! I thought he was just going in because he was restless and was going to tell Matt something . . . and come right home. So I stowed away in the back of his car—to—sort of surprise him. He expected to meet Matt at the highway, but I guess it was a frame-up. Two men jumped him and—"

"My God, they attacked the car and you were in it?" Ferris gasped, gripping the doorway with one hand, the other arm about Holly.

"No, Burr got out. He thought Matt was there," she said quickly. Then she told the whole story while Della, Pat and her grandfather stared at her in shocked incredulity.

When she had finished, Ferris said, "You've given me the fright of my life." His voice was stern. "Never did I imagine you'd do such a silly, childish thing. How can I sleep in my bed after this, with any peace of mind?"

"I'm sorry, gramps," Holly said, her face pale and strained.

"Shame on you, father!" Della said. "Can't you see the child's exhausted? You know she's no scatterbrain. And anyway you look at it, Ben Ferris, Burr would likely have been killed if the child hadn't been there!"

Ben eyed his daughter angrily for a moment. Then he said, looking down at Holly, "It was the fright you gave me, child. To be honest, I'm so proud of you I had to make some kind of a fuss, so I lost my temper!"

Holly threw her arms around her grandfather. Then she said, "If I'm forgiven, will you all do me a little favor? Don't—don't tell Burr about my rescuing him."

"But we'll have to, Dolly," Ben objected. "He'll want to know as soon as he wakes up how he got back here."

"But don't tell him right away. I mean—let me think about it over night." Holly looked pleadingly at Ben and the doctor, and then ran quickly out of the room.

With the help of Dr. Dingle's sedatives, Burr slept until nearly ten o'clock the next morning.

"Head hurt?" the doctor asked, leaning forward.

"Wow!" Burr replied, trying to turn his head and closing his eyes quickly as a sharp pain went zigzagging across it.

"I'd better give you something to stop that," said the doctor.

"Wait," said Burr, as everything started coming back to him. "I want to know—"

"Time enough for questions later," replied Dr. Dingle. "Just take this capsule now. It won't put you to sleep again, but it ought to cut down on that large headache of yours."

Dixon did as he was told, and then sank back gratefully on the pillow. "Thanks, doc. Now tell me how—"

But the doctor was heading for the door. "I promised Ben I'd tell him when you woke up. Save your questions for a while."

Burr didn't really mind waiting. It was an effort to think, even to wonder about what had happened to him the night before.

Ben came in to see him, and Della, but there was no sign of Holly. Both of them, like the doctor, were evasive when Burr asked questions. He'd doubtless have insisted on the truth, except that the doctor's capsule was keeping him pretty foggy.

Even Nez Bah came to bring him a message from Silago Nez.

"He is better and tomorrow he will walk," she said. "He is glad that you are

also recovering. And he thanks you for saving those things you found in the cave, but they did not belong to him. He gave them back to the little doctor."

"Do you still think it was a bad idea to open the cave?" Dixon asked her.

She looked at him in silence for a moment, than shook her head slowly.

"I do not know, for sure," she replied. "My grandfather says 'No. If the Mountain made a mistake and shut something that was evil in there, then it was better to let it out to go away.' What do you think?" Her somber eyes questioned him.

"Well," Dixon replied slowly, "I guess something was let out, all right, but it's too soon for me to tell you if I think it was better for it to get away."

She nodded gravely. "You are a good man," she said. "I like you. And I like it for you to be fond of Holly. It is good for her happiness."

She didn't seem to move quickly, but she walked so silently in the doeskin moccasins, that she had vanished before Dixon recovered from the effect of her last words.

Good for her, is it? he thought with a wry smile. I wish *she* thonght so! She hasn't even been in to see me—I believe she really is through with me.

While he was thinking morosely of Holly's attitude he heard a car driving into the yard. The door slammed. A moment later he heard a voice, that he recognized with a shock. It was Carole's, asking for him. There was a patter of light feet in the living room, and Holly's voice.

Then Burr heard again Carole's penetrating tone with its oddly sharp sweetness. "That funny kid cowboy of yours told our Susy when she was out riding around this morning. Of course I came right down—I was so shocked." Burr listened with horrified fascination. "He couldn't keep our date, so I brought it to him," she finished.

"I'm sure he's awake," Holly said. "He's had constant visitors. Everybody is so concerned."

"Oh, they are!" he muttered sarcastically. "How about *you?*"

There was a light but firm tap on his door. Then it opened a few inches, and Carole's bright head appeared. Dixon hadn't time to shut his eyes, even if he'd dared—Carole Hendrix was a girl you needed to encounter with eyes wide open, especially in Dixon's present half-dazed state.

"Darling!" she exclaimed, coming in and almost closing the door behind her. She crossed to his bed with a rush and a sharp tapping of high heels.

"Carole," he groaned, "cut out that darling stuff."

She dropped to her knees beside him. "Are you really cross with me?" she asked in the most serious tone he had ever heard her use. And he saw there were dark smudges beneath her eyes, a drawn look to her bright mouth. "Don't be!"

"All right, be a nice girl and I won't," he said lightly.

The next minute her arm was across his chest and her face pressed softly against his.

"Oh, Burr, this isn't fooling, I mean it. I want you to like me. I'll never let you get tired of me. We'll have wonderful times." She held him tighter, and he was too astounded to protest, alarmed by the gravity in her voice, the tenseness of her manner. "Burr—let's get married! Now, today. My car's out here. Come, go with me!"

"Carole!" he exclaimed. "You don't know what you're saying!"

"I do," she said. "I'm putting up the fight of my life. I don't want to marry Sherwood. He's coming in a few days and—" she paused.

In spite of himself, Burr was moved to sympathy. "Nobody can make you marry anybody you don't want to," he said firmly, trying now to extricate himself.

"And you—you won't?" she asked, her face close to his, looking tensely into his eyes.

"No, Carole," he told her quietly. "I don't love you. You're fun. I tried to keep things gay and friendly between us. But you—"

She jumped to her feet. "Don't go on," she said. "I get it. I tried, and that's that." She looked at him seriously. "'Bye," she said softly. "And wish me luck. . . . I need it."

She went out and closed the door softly without glancing back.

A moment later he heard her car start and go racing off down the lane.

The scene with Carole had been so stormy that Burr was feeling more alert, as if he'd been doused with cold water.

I'm going to get up! he decided. Lying in bed a man's too easy to attack.

He sat up. But he couldn't see his clothing. Then he heard Ranny's voice outside the window and shouted for him to come in.

"Gosh, but you're the lucky guy!" Ranny exclaimed when he opened the door. "Carole Hendrix coming to see you, making a great rumpus because she's so worried. And Holly rescuing you. Gosh, but I'd of liked to see her level that gun on those murdering sons-of-guns!"

"What do you mean?" Dixon asked, an ominous tone in his voice.

"Gosh, don't you know?" Ranny exclaimed, his voice squeaking in his amazement.

"No," Dixon said sternly. "Tell me at once and no foolishness."

"Well," Ranny began, his face beaming with the joy of relating something of exciting interest, "Holly was going to play a trick on you last night. She hid in your car when you went away, under the blanket in the back. When those fellows knocked you out, she sure was on a spot. While they was fooling around getting ready to finish you, she crawled out and around back of the car and sneaked your gun outa your belt and made 'em drive off in their car. Cross my heart and hope to die if that isn't so!" he wound up as he saw shocked disbelief on Dixon's face.

Dixon muttered something unintelligible.

"Ask Ben, ask Della," Ranny said. "They'll tell you it's true. And Pat was in the bedroom when Holly told 'em all what happened."

Dixon was speechless for a moment, Ranny staring down at him uneasily. Then he said quietly, "Ask Holly to come in a moment. Tell her I must see her."

"Sure, sure, I'll get her in a jiff," Ranny said.

Dixon lay staring at the ceiling. His heart thumped till it seemed to him it lifted the sheet over his chest. Holly had done that! She might have been killed. What was he going to say to her!

There was a low tap at the door; then it opened and she moved slowly forward to stand near the bed looking at him with eyes that he found completely unreadable. She spoke first.

"I don't want you to thank me," she said. "Anybody in my place would have done what I did. I know we'll have to talk it over. I must tell you what happened, but I couldn't see enough of either of the two men to ever identify them. . . . I went to town with Gran'dad and the doctor this morning to tell Matt everything I could. It was terrible!" Her voice trembled, almost broke.

"I want to do everything I can to help get those murderers," she went on. "But I feel the same way. Uncle Dick's not at the bottom of all this. What those men were plotting, what they meant to do—oh—Dick never, never in all this world would do anything like that!"

"I won't make you answer questions about last night now," Dixon said. "We'll talk it over some other time. But now I insist on telling you what you wouldn't listen to the other day."

"Why?" she asked. "I knew it was about Carole. I've known her all my life, so I could guess what you were up against. And it has nothing to do with me anyhow."

"It isn't Carole," Dixon said. "It's far more serious. It's the reason I came down into this country. I came because from the time I can remember, my father's most thrilling story was the account of a stage holdup he was mixed up in. He was a passenger on that Three Wells Stage that was held up twenty-five years ago."

"Oh!" Holly gasped. "That awful tragedy was just an exciting story to you. You came to picture it the way your father had told it, trying to imagine things like a movie!"

"Well, not exactly that," Burr protested. "My father's dead now, and I wanted to make the same trip through this country that he had when he was a young man. I had no idea of meeting anybody,

connected with the—with the holdup. I was always on the point of explaining, but it wasn't easy."

"Was it your father who testified against Dick?" Holly asked in an almost inaudible voice.

"Not against him," Burr denied. "But he did see the brand on the horse."

He felt as if all the lovely understanding that had first been between Holly and himself was destroyed.

"My staying here was a mistake," he said, "but I wanted to so much. I like Ben more than I have any man since my father died. They're the same kind of men, bred on the old range, strong and tough. . . . As soon as things clear up, I'll go away. And until then, I'll try to keep all this from him."

Holly's only response was a long, tremulous sigh.

Dixon didn't believe it was a time to mention his feelings for her, but it was all he could do to restrain himself.

After a moment she spoke. "I'm glad you told me," she said. "It explains some things I've felt about you. And now . . . I can't talk any more about it. Some other time, there will be things—" she broke off and turned to the door.

"All right, Holly," he said. "Some other time. Thank you for coming now."

Talking to Holly with such formality was almost more than he could manage. He'd talk to her again before he left—about themselves. There had been no pretense in her kisses, he was sure. And no emotion that strong could die so quickly.

He decided to stay in bed through the afternoon. He admitted he felt rocky, but his mind had cleared considerably. He wanted to think, and he could do that if he lay still.

He had believed the man on the broken-shoed horse had left the country. Where had the man disappeared to? Had he also been the rider of the borrowed, barefoot bay? Where was the loot taken from the cave? A box or parcel large enough to fit the dust imprint in the rock cupboard wasn't something a fellow could tuck into his pocket. Burr thought about the size bundles of currency would be . . . of the size and weight of bags of gold coin. There had been both in the loot taken from the stage.

It was nearing suppertime when he came to several conclusions. If Sampson had been available he would have talked them over with him, but he'd heard that the sheriff was away until the next day. And Dixon couldn't wait.

To carry out his plan he must move from the ranch house. With that in view, he got hold of Ben and the doctor. With Della he knew he wouldn't have a chance. She was determined to keep him under her supervision and see he was taken proper care of.

Dingle looked him over and said he could move if he liked. Ben understood, or thought he did, and backed Dixon up.

"Know just how you feel," he said. "Hate fuss, hate being made to feel I'm sick. Rather be back in my own bed."

"And I'll eat supper with the gang," Burr declared.

Stowing away a good meal was part of his plan, though he felt little appetite for it. And he had to get hold of Pat.

Dingle got Burr's clothes from the closet and talked to him while he dressed.

"Say, Dixon, I've been looking over those old bones Silago Nez gave back to me. You know, I think they're human bones."

Dixon started. "You mean that?"

The little doctor nodded solemnly. "Look like finger bones to me."

Burr's lips closed grimly. He was a bit groggy and had the very devil of a sore head, but he was even more sure now of what he had to do. If he didn't jiggle around, he could walk all right and sit up without dizziness.

After supper he cornered Pat. "Remember telling me to speak up if I needed somebody who would follow without question and who had a couple of good fists?"

"Sure do," Pat grinned.

"Okay. You've got a job tonight, after the place settles down."

"Tonight!" Pat exclaimed, eyeing Burr doubtfully. "You ain't up to shenanigans yet, fella."

"I'm up to this, with your help," Burr insisted. "Come on over here on this bench

and let me talk where nobody can overhear. I'll explain."

Pat listened in silence save for an occasional excited exclamation.

When Dixon had finished, the red-headed cowpuncher shook his head doubtfully again. "That's a devil of a long ride," he said. "It may take us the best part of the night."

"I'm going in and stretch out on my bunk now," Burr said. "I'll leave it to you to gather up what we need, and saddle the horses later."

"Sure, sure," Pat assented. "Of course, going about it this way suits me fine, and if it's the wrong guess, nobody'll be the wiser. But you're sure you don't want to wait and let Sampson take over? After all, the sheriff—"

"No," Burr said emphatically. "I've got a personal reason for doing it this way, if it's possible."

"Okay," Pat said, "I'm with you. If it's there we'll get it."

Dixon went to sleep as soon as he lay down. Not even Ranny's horseplay roused him. The bunkhouse was dark when he felt Pat's hand on his shoulder and heard his low, "Burr! It's time. I've saddled the horses, all ready to move."

He dressed hastily and in silence. Then the two stole from the bunkhouse and crossed the yard, still in silence. The big house was dark.

"Got everything lashed fast," Pat said when they reached the two horses tied to the fence. "I got a couple of hearty sandwiches from Nez Bah, coffee to boil and a little tin bucket to fix it in. She won't tell nobody. She speaks three languages, but she knows how to hold her tongue in all of them."

Dixon's head didn't bother as much as he'd feared it would. In fact it had no sensation, so long as he held it level.

They paused a moment at the Springs, listening to the musical tinkling of the falling water. Going up the ridge side, the horses took their own way. There was no moon, and the clouds were very dense. Once or twice they heard a low rumbling of thunder.

"Hope that holds off till we get back," Pat said. "This trail can be pretty nasty when it's wet."

More familiar with the terrain, he took the lead when they made the turn at the top of the hillside trail. It was impossible to make any speed but no more than an hour and a half had passed when they sighted the dark bulk of the log cabin a short distance ahead of them.

They tied the two horses securely to an old post. When they were inside and the door was closed tight, there was small chance of anybody seeing light from within. Any that seeped through a crack wouldn't be visible far, and there wasn't a chance in a thousand that anybody else was on the range then.

With the good reflector lantern burning, Dixon felt a surge of confidence. The light gave reality to their project. Pat brought in the spade and a strong burlap sack. Burr was already cleaning the ashes from the fireplace, which had not been disturbed since his other visit. As he had discovered then, there was only dirt on the floor of the fireplace. Stones circled the front, but they were easily set aside, and Pat commenced to dig.

He thrust the spade in with caution, lifting the dirt and dumping it in a heap out of their way.

Burr watched intently. When the hole was a couple of feet deep, he said, "He went down plenty far—or I guessed wrong."

"You didn't guess wrong," Pat assured him a moment later. "I've hit something."

Going ahead with care, presently he disclosed a tarp-wrapped bundle.

"That's it!" Dixon exclaimed. "And it's going to be the shape of what was taken from the cupboard, all right," he added with rising excitement.

When the dirt was all removed from on top, Pat reached down and lifted the oblong bundle. He laid it out on the cabin floor and they bent over it with tense faces. The rope wrapped around it was comparatively new, and the knots had been recently tied. Burr undid them, and slowly, almost solemnly, opened the folds.

"Look!" Pat exclaimed, pointing.

"Yes," Burr replied. "That's the first

real link we've had to hold anything together." He lifted the creased and flattened felt hat, opening it to reveal a hole with blackened edges. "So the gunman that tried to get me on Juniper Mountain, also packed this bundle from the cave."

"That's real proof," Pat said, sitting back on his heels.

Under the hat was another wrapped bundle, which Dixon opened eagerly. Instead of the gold and greenbacks he'd expected to find, there was only a heap of whitened bones.

Both men stared for a moment.

"What are you going to do with it?" Pat asked.

"Take it back to the ranch, call up Matt and turn it over to him," Dixon replied.

They were tying up the bundle again, when the reverberating peal of thunder came with startling suddenness. It rolled back and forth across the sky, the walls of the cabin vibrant from its power. Almost at once the storm hit. Torrents of rain fell.

They brought the horses inside and tied them at one end of the cabin, while the rushing downfall of the huge drops kept on and on. Pat restored the dirt he had dug from the fireplace. Then he kindled a blaze from some stuff he had carried in when they first came.

"I know I can do with a cup of coffee," he said, "and you look like you could."

"Yes," Burr agreed. "I should feel triumphant, I guess, but I don't."

"There's been too much killing and trouble," Pat said. "And we don't know that even finding this is going to end it. So long as the murderer is loose, he's going to be figgering on killing somebody to protect himself."

"Seems queer," Burr said presently, "that this was hidden in a big storm, and we find it just as another hits the country."

"Nez Bah would have something to say about that," Pat declared.

It was daylight before they could start back. By then only sheer will power kept Dixon going. He could scarcely see, his head ached so blindingly.

Pat lashed the tarp bundle to his horse, the tools to Dixon's. The going was bad. They sloshed through muddy pools and across gullies that still ran deep with muddy water. The ridge side was the worst. Every bit of rock that wasn't anchored fast had washed down into the valley. Here and there sections of the trail were missing, necessitating a detour. It was past seven when they reached the level.

For Dixon, racking his brain to figure how to explain things the easiest way to Ben, the ride down the valley was a good deal of a nightmare.

The sun was out, but the drenched world had a droopy appearance that Pat said was a good match for their own. Ranny spied them riding into the yard and let out a lusty yell that brought everybody outside.

"Where were you?" he demanded, racing up and staring curiously at the load on Pat's saddle. "You snuk out in the night!" he accused. "Where'd you go?"

"It's a long story, kid," Pat replied. "We can't tell it till we get some breakfast."

"Aw, have a heart!" Ranny mumbled. "Can't you see we're just bustin' to find out?"

Dixon got stiffly from his saddle. "We've got on the trail of something we can't say much about till we report to the sheriff," he said. "Better bring that bundle into the house," he added to Pat. Then he looked at Ben. "I'd like to talk to you alone."

Ben nodded. "In my room," he said, turning to lead the way.

Burr followed and closed the door behind them.

It wasn't an easy task he had set himself, but it had to be faced and Ben Ferris had to be told. The best way was to be direct, get it over with without too much preliminary.

"Maybe I should wait for Sampson to get here," Burr began, "but I feel as if I want to tell you myself. And there are going to be moves to make, so it's best to clear the way."

He started at the beginning, relating his suspicions on the day he found the cottonwood club in the cave behind the door, using only a few words for each sequence of the grim tale. When he referred to Dick Ferris and the stage holdup Ben bowed his head for a moment, the gaunt, strong hands gripping the arms of his chair. Dixon fin-

ished by confessing the motive that had brought him into the country.

"It was the one real adventure of my Dad's life," he said, "the story he had to tell us almost every evening, when we were youngsters. He made this country seem so vivid. When some business brought me down this way, I couldn't resist going over his old trails. I never imagined where they would lead. And I've felt like a sneak, not telling you in the first place. I really didn't need the job—I own half-interest in the home ranch. One purpose of this trip was to look up another location. My brother is prepared to buy out my half, and I'd thought of trying it in different country. That was my only excuse for the deception. I sort of justified myself that I was using the opportunity to look around, if I stayed on here." He was floundering uncomfortably.

"You don't have to excuse yourself, son," Ben told him. "I understand. And I'm not too surprised. I'd noticed your name, it's not common. I remembered one of the passengers on that stage was a Dixon."

When they emerged from Ben's room there was a grim cast to his features; yet there was a certain light in his eyes that held Della's gaze.

"Matt phoned," she said. "I didn't want to disturb you. He's on his way out, he'll be here any minute. Said he has news."

"So have we," Ben declared solemnly.

Dixon and Pat washed up and Crowley ate a hasty breakfast. Dingle cornered Burr.

"I'm giving you a shot," he said. "Not to dope you but to relieve that head of yours. Looks like you're going to have to use it pretty strenuously this morning."

Dixon was just rolling down his sleeve when Matt drove in. And he'd had but a few words with the sheriff when the Hendrix touring car arrived with a rush and stopped abruptly at the front of the house. The Senator got out followed by Paul Hendrix and his son. Sampson stepped into the kitchen where he talked in low tones with Pat. But neither of the newcomers appeared to pay much attention to the occupants of the living room.

"What do you know about my daughter?" Paul asked Ben Ferris bruskly.

"Carole?" Ben said, surprised. "Not a thing."

"She left the house yesterday morning. Told us she was going to Three Wells and didn't know how late she'd be back," Hendrix said. "I was a little worried when she didn't return, nor telephone us. But I didn't know until this morning that she took a suitcase with her. Susy Gillis saw her put it in her car. And Susy tells a garbled tale about Carole being all upset about this fellow," he jerked his head towards Dixon. "She told Susy they might elope! Such crazy talk! Carole never made any such statement—Susy's a fool! But did Carole stop in here? Did you see her? The storm ripped out our phone line, and I couldn't call you." He talked so fast nobody could answer till he halted.

"Carole stopped here, but she only stayed a few minutes," Holly said. "She went on to town, I thought."

"She's had an accident," Les put in, "you know how crazy she drives. Better call the sheriff's office. And the hospital in Three Wells."

"No need to do that," Sampson said quietly, appearing in the kitchen doorway. "I've got a wire here I was going to deliver as soon's I 'tended to a little business with Ben." He extended a yellow envelope. "That came in first thing this morning, but the office couldn't get hold of you on the phone."

Paul Hendrix had ripped open the flimsy envelope and jerked out the single sheet it contained. The Senator read the lines over one shoulder, Carole's brother over the other.

"She's married!" Les exclaimed. "To Sherwood!"

"What'd she do that for?" Paul snapped. "That's what we wanted her to do. What'd she pull this kind of a stunt for?"

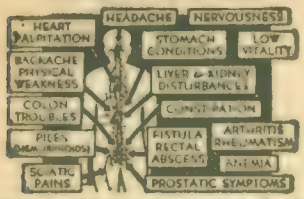
The Senator lifted his white-crested head with dignity. "No sense in annoying our neighbors with family affairs," he said smoothly. "I think we had better go back to the ranch and tell Carole's mother. It will be a great relief." His glance flicked over Dixon and he got the implication.

"Just a minute," Sampson said. "There are a few developments I might as well

ACCOUNTANT
BECOME AN EXPERT
Executive Accountants and C. P. A's earn $5,000 to $10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A's. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays."
LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 575-H Chicago 5, Ill.

High School Course at Home
Many Finish in 2 Years
Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H-539, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

Good News To Fistula Sufferers
Interesting FREE BOOK on Dangers of Delay



Illustrated, authentic 40-page book on Fistula, Piles (Hemorrhoids), related ailments and colon disorders is yours FREE. Write today. Thornton & Minor Clinic, Suite C502, 926 McGee St., Kansas City, Mo.

Stop Getting Up Nights
TRY THIS FREE
If you get up many times at night due to Irritation of Bladder or Urinary Tract, and have never used PALMO TABLETS we want you to try them at our risk. We will send you a full-size package from which you are to use 20 tablets FREE. If not delighted at the palliative relief received, return the package and you owe us nothing. We mean it. Send No Money. No C. O. D. to pay. Write today and we will send your PALMO TABLETS by return mail postpaid. Address:
H. D. POWERS CO., Dept. 515-M, Box 135, Battle Creek, Mich.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home
MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 50—Many Swedish Massage graduates make $50, $75 or even more per week. Large full time incomes from doctors, hospitals, sanatoriums, clubs or private practice. Others make good money in spare time. You can win independence and prepare for future security by training at home and qualifying for Diploma. Anatomy Charts and 32-page Illustrated Book FREE—Now! THE College of Swedish Massage, Dept. 812-E, 100 E. Ohio St., Chicago 11, Ill.

take up with you, seeing's you're here, save me driving on out to your place."

"Certainly, anything we can do," Cal Hendrix replied, "only if it will take long, I suggest you let us go and you follow when you and Ben finish your business."

"It won't take long," Sampson said with a sudden grimness. He didn't lift his voice but something sinister seemed to enter the room as he spoke.

"Only long enough to tell you that I've been doing a little checking. Burr Dixon has cooperated. And we've lined up some results I'm passing on now."

The Senator lifted his eyebrows, puzzled, a shade impatient. His son bit down irritably on the unlighted cigar he had thrust between his lips. Les Hendrix looked from one to the other with a frown.

"I traced Rufe Prettyman to that gang he ran with for a while at the Capitol and learned some mighty interesting things last night. I found out whose pay he was drawing besides his check from Ben every month. That connection was well hidden, but after the doc here recognized him, it was easy."

The two older Hendrix men changed color slightly, but their eyes were scornful.

"And, to boil this down and give you the highlights, Dixon and Pat dug up the cache that was moved from the cave at the springs a couple of nights ago. Got it in here," he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "It was kind of a shock to discover them bones. And that gold watch that belonged to Dick Ferris, with his boots Holly'd seen before they was moved. I've been mighty suspicious about them boots all the time. Holly's too smart a girl to be that badly fooled. But shucks, wasn't no use stirrin' up a mess till I had more to go on. Slow and easy gets along faster than racing along, scattering the pieces."

"What are you trying to say?" the Senator asked steadily.

"I'm trying to say," Matt Sampson stated clearly, "that it was your son Paul that robbed that stage. He cached the stuff in the cave. I don't know why Dick suspicioned him, but they ran around together

some, and I s'pose he had idees about young Paul that other folks maybe didn't get. Dick ran into Paul at the cave. Mebbe you was there, too. One of you killed him. There's two bullets in the skull yet, where he was shot. I dunno just how complete the storm knocked in that wall. My guess is you fellers helped it. And you didn't think it would ever be opened up!"

"That's the most stinking pack of lies I ever heard!" Paul shouted.

"It's the truth," Sampson said coolly. "It'll be proved. You was damned scared when Holly decided to have Rainbow Cave reopened. Tried to lease the place and take over repairs so you could get rid of those bones and all the evidence that proves it was Dick Ferris buried in there all these years. The twenty-five thousand dollars you stole from the stage put your father into politics and boosted you both so high you thought you never could fall."

Les Hendrix was staring at his father and grandfather with mingled horror and apprehension. "So that's why you kept egging me on to marry Holly and said you'd hand over all that oil stock if I did!" he exclaimed, as if he had lost all control. "And it's why you told me yesterday to forget it! You—"

"Easy, boy," Ben said. "Don't say something you'll be sorry for."

Dixon had stepped close behind Paul Hendrix without being noticed as everybody's gaze went to the white, taut face of Les Hendrix. Now Dixon's hand clamped down on Paul's shoulder and he said sharply, "Take off your coat!"

"Why you damned—"

Dixon struck him sharply on the mouth, crushing the cigar between Paul's suddenly clenched teeth. "Sampson's got a warrant for your arrest," he said. "You're the guy who killed Rufe, substituted his body for Dick's, and hid Dick's bones on the cave shelf. That was all you dared take time for that day. But you'd gone back for the package of bones the night Silago Nez camped at the cave. Only in your hurry to get away, you didn't quite get all the bones. Ben has identified one of them as Dick's. He broke a finger when he was a kid.

INVENTORS

Patent laws encourage the development of inventions. Our firm is registered to practice before the U. S. Patent Office. Write for further particulars as to patent protection and procedure and "Invention Record" form at once. No obligation.

McMORROW, BERMAN & DAVIDSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
129-H Victor Building Washington 1, D. C.

RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof, can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:

Cluthe Sons, Dept. 39, Bloomfield, New Jersey

DRUNKENNESS

Ruins health, happiness and prosperity. Treat it in your home with ALCONOX—helps bring relief quickly, easily, inexpensively—in a few days—with or without drinker's knowledge! Treatment does not interfere with the social or working life of the drinker. NO BOOKS TO READ. ALCONOX is a READY-TO-USE, PREPARED FORMULA, and is the only low-priced method sold under a MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE. Doctors indorse the treatment and find it very efficient. ONE HAPPY USER WRITES: "Please SEND ME ANOTHER WONDERFUL TREATMENT AT ONCE FOR A FRIEND WHO IS A VERY HEAVY DRINKER. I BOUGHT FROM YOU BEFORE AND HAD WONDERFUL RESULTS ON ALL WHOM I BOUGHT FOR." SEND NO MONEY—JUST YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS—then pay postman $5.00 plus a few cents C.O.D. charges. (If you want to save C.O.D. charges send $5.00 with your order.) Treatment and instructions sent in plain wrapper.

HEALTH-AIDS RESEARCH
P. O. Box 724, Dept. P-1 CHICAGO 90, ILLINOIS
You Will Bless the Day You Answered This Advertisement

DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution: Use only as directed.

30 Years in Business

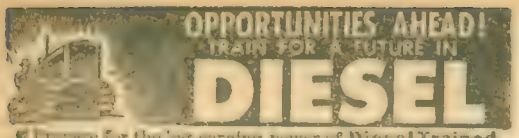
THE NEWELL COMPANY
600 Clayton, Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK

LAW...

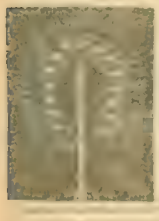
STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. **More Ability: More Prestige: More Money** We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 575-L Chicago 5, Ill.



Prepare for the big earning power of **Diesel Trained Men.** Start learning at home, in spare time. UEI's easy, practical training covers all phases of DIESEL engine operation, fuel systems, auxiliary equipment, repairs and maintenance. When home course is completed, you come to Chicago for actual shop practice on DIESEL MOTORS under expert instructors at UEI's fine, modern school. BEGIN AT ONCE—GET ALL THE FACTS FREE. WRITE TODAY!

DIESEL DIVISION **UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE**
2521 Sheffield Avenue • Dept. 958-D • Chicago 14, Illinois



IMITATION DIAMONDS
TIEPIN

Also for Scarf or Lapel. Handsome "HORSE-SHOE" design with sparkling imitation diamonds in Sterling Silver. About 2½ inches in length. **ONLY** $3.98 plus 60¢ Federal Tax Satisfaction or money back. **SEND NO MONEY** —pay postman plus postage and C.O.D. fee. Order TODAY.

RAMONA CO.
Dept. NF-548 Wheeling, W. Va.

What do you want to know about—

fishing, fishing tackle, hunting, guns and ammunition, camping equipment, dogs, canoes, boats and engines?

The most satisfactory and easy way to get whatever information you want is to read the largest and finest of all outdoor magazines—

Field & Stream

The editors of the ten departments which are part of every issue are outstanding authorities. They will be glad to answer your questions at any time: all they ask is that you enclose return postage with your inquiry.

You will find in the current issue a dozen articles about shooting, fishing, etc. which you will greatly enjoy, and the ten departments packed with practical money-saving where-when-and-how-to-do-it information and facts.

25c a copy

on all good newsstands

AUSTIN CORCORAN and MYRTLE JULIETTE COREY

"Now I'll take off that coat and show up the wound you got when I shot at you on Juniper Mountain; and you're the rat who faked that call from Boyd."

It was true. A fresh groove across his left arm was testimony. All the pieces fell into position. The mass of evidence couldn't be refuted.

But the Senator said with dignity as he went out to the sheriff's car. "I have nothing to say until I consult my attorney!"

To his father's scorn, Paul had gone to pieces, cursing and raving as Pat took charge of him.

Silago Nez stood with Nez Bah as the sheriff's car drove away with the two prisoners, Pat a hastily sworn in deputy guarding them. The old Navajo raised a hand in a magnificent gesture, lifting his face to the sun. "Good!" he said in a sonorous voice.

Burr turned back into the house, following with long swift strides as Holly made for the stairway to put over, he feared, a vanishing act.

"Wait!" he commanded, catching hold of her arm as he made a final long leap.

"Not now," she said, "I—I'm too upset to talk now."

"I don't intend to talk," he said. "I am going to kiss you. That's the way I can find out what you really think."

Several minutes later she asked meekly, clinging tight to him. "Well, *did* you find out?"

"I sure did!" he declared solemnly. "You can't ever take that back."

"I won't," she promised.

They looked around and saw Della smiling at them.

"I'm so glad," she said, putting her arms about Holly and taking Burr's hand in a tight clasp. "As soon as I was sure—after I saw Holly looking at you when you were unconscious—I told Matt we could be married any time he wanted. I knew you and Holly would look after father. Maybe we can make it a double wedding!"

The End

TRAIL DUST

THIS DEPARTMENT will endeavor to cut sign on some of the colorful happenings of today's West and haze the stuff along to you—twentieth century trail dust, stirred up by folks in the cow country.

THE NEW LOOK in Western apparel: boots, which used to be fashionable with 12-inch tops, now are smartest with 10. And ten gallon hats are smaller, too. They used to have 6½-inch crowns with 6-inch brims; but now they have 5½-inch crowns and 3-inch brims. How many gallons does the New Look hold?

THE HIGH COST OF LIVING is not a new story. Just to cheer you up, these are some prices in Montana in 1879:

1 bar soap	$3.00
1 lb. sugar	1.50
1 lb. coffee	1.25
1 lb. beans	1.25

Beef, however, cost 25 cents. Flour finally hit $150 a sack, so the cow-hands got only beef to eat!

DENVER is a big city, yet its traffic was held up for some time by a busy beaver attempting to cross one of the main streets. A policeman finally lassoed one of its feet and hauled it out of the way of motorists.

THERE'S a big fight going on between professors and ranchers on the subject of hibernation of bears. A Harvard University curator says that a bear doesn't really hibernate, because a stone thrown at him will awaken him. A State Engineer of Wyoming and a rancher of note in Colorado insist that even kicking a hibernating bear will not awaken him. "And I've kicked them," says the rancher. "I'd defy anyone—even a Harvard professor—to wake a bear up in the winter."

THE CAPILANO INDIANS of British Columbia have shipped a huge cedar log down to Texas. And they're also sending their head man, Chief Joe Matthias, down to the Lone Star State to carve a 30-foot totem pole to be presented to Texas as a gift from the Indians of Canada.

FRIDAY the 13th, comes twice in 1948, which means extra sack-time for Jimmy Spears of Hillsboro, Tex. He claims he has bad luck every Friday and on the 13th day of any month, anyway. When they come together, he figures it's too dangerous to be up and around. So for 32 years, he's simply climbed in bed every Friday the 13th.

SUSIE Q is a Hereford, but she's only 2 feet high and she weighs 150 pounds. She's a runt—a pitifully bowlegged and malformed cow that people laugh at and cattle avoid. However, when the other cows and bulls go to market, Susie Q stays home. "She's too little," says her Colorado owner, "not a T-bone on her."

HERE'S one way to get into the movies—Western style! Ben Johnson of Pawhuska, Okla., stopped a team of runaway horses that was dragging a wagon with three men inside. A movie magnate happened to see the rescue, and now Joe has a 7-year contract!

OUT OF THE CHUTES

A CAPACITY crowd at El Paso, Tex., took in the doings of a capacity roster of contestants at the Southwestern Championship Rodeo. There were 200 cowboys as against 105 last year, and most of the names are familiar to rodeo fans.

The show closed just too late for its results to make this issue, but here are some of the contenders who seemed likely to win in their events.

George Brown of Grapevine, Tex., was out in front in calf-roping, pulling ahead of Dee Burk, Comanche, Okla., and Bill Linderman, Red Lodge, Mont.

Todd Whatley, the RCA's nominee for All-Around Cowboy of 1947, showed the crowd what it takes to make a champion steer-wrestler. His total time was about half that of his nearest rival, Whiz Whisenhunt. Both boys hail from Hugo, Okla. Maybe kids start wrestling steers early there. Homer Pettigrew, five times a bulldogging champ, was also in the running for final prize money.

As so often happens when the Lindermans are competing, Bill and Bud placed one-two in saddle-bronc riding, and either might have won, depending on the final go-round. Ross Dollarhide, Lake View, Ore., was also a contender.

Another rodeo star lived up to his reputation at El Paso. Squaw Man, producer Verne Elliott's fire-eating bronc, was just as tough on top-hands as ever. He's the bucker who's only been ridden twice so far, and never in the money.

A special attraction was a match roping contest held as a matinee feature. First place winners were Homer Pettigrew, Lefty Wilkens and Walt Poage.

We hear from Foghorn Clancy that the Tulsa Rodeo was bigger and better this year. It was held March 12-21, too late to catch this issue of RR, but all the signs pointed to one of the roughest, toughest rodeos ever.

The 200 cowboys who competed at El Paso, apparently packed up and moved en masse to Tulsa, to split up the $30,000 prize money—not counting entry fees.

An uncommon way to dismount

There's a newcomer to the field of rodeo producing, but he's no novice where horses and ranching are concerned. He's Wild Bill Elliott, the well known Western star, and his rodeo is scheduled to tour the Midwest and South, beginning March 28 at Baton Rouge, La.

He's planning a new feature, bull-fighting. However, it will be part of the entertainment, just an exhibition of cape work and foot work, and there'll be no injuries to the bulls or bullfighters.

Wild Bill is a director of the Pacific Coast Quarter Horse Association, and is one of the top authorities on that smart, swift breed. Although Bill is also one of the top names in Western films, he seems more interested in rodeoing than romeoing!

Adios,

THE EDITORS

Amateur Page

EDITOR'S NOTE: This page is composed of original cartoons, verse or prose pertaining to the West and written by amateurs only. For each contribution published we pay $2.00, and more than one contribution may be submitted by any person. Each contribution MUST be the original work of the person submitting it. Address: The Amateur Page, Ranch Romances, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. No submissions will be returned nor can we enter into correspondence about them.

A Little Prayer

GOD, give me a bed
Where a sunset of red
Mellows the Western sky.
Where the sweet-scented breeze
Sings a song of the trees—
A Westerner am I.

Where the great ocean's roll
Brings peace to my soul,
As each night in sleep I lie.
If the dawn I ne'er see
'Tis happy I'll be—
A Westerner I'll die.

Mrs. Alice Brockley, Kalama, Wash.

Montana

MONTANA, land of mountains
Silhouetted against the blue;
Ragged crags that touch the sky
Blended with every hue.

Green and gold and crimson
Jack Frost paints with pride.
No artist's brush can equal
The ever changing tide.

Montana, lakes and falls,
Mighty rivers wide,
Pine trees sway and whisper
Along the great divide.

They whisper of your beauty,
An Eden in the West,
Never fading, ever changing
Nature loves you best.

Montana, friendly state
The sunrise warms the heart,
To fall in love with the moonlight
And soon to be a part. . .

A part of this glorious state
Where men their destinies hold,
And hearts are filled with contentment
Made richer by sunset's gold.

Mrs. Elizabeth Lake, Missoula, Mont.

Fowl Play

TWO NOTED wakeners—the clock,
And that proud reveler, the cock!
The one sounds off in regulation,
The other needs no invitation.
The one, as dawn breaks in the dell,
Reveals the hour by buzz or bell;
But ere it's time to end your napping,
Your sleep's disturbed by wings a-flapping.
Alarm or rooster—which preferred?
At least the latter is a bird
Which, when you reckon how to beat him,
Has this good point—you still can eat him!

Harlan Leach, Jonesboro, Md.

David Barfield, Rush Springs, Okla.

My Cowboy

EACH morning I awaken to the sound of
cowboy yells,
And all day the fights my brave top-hand quells.
No strangers molest me, no rustler dares come
near—
My comboy's two sixguns make outlaws shrink
in fear.
All day, with spurs jingling, my cowboy's very
bold;
But at night he becomes my son—just four
years old!

Clyde O. Chandler, Winnfield, La.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For 20 years Our Air Mail has been running between reader and reader of Ranch Romances, making for them new friends in near and far-off places. Any reader may write directly to anyone whose letter is printed in this department, provided he upholds the clean, wholesome spirit of Ranch Romances.

Our Air Mail is intended for those who really want correspondents. We ask you to refrain from using it as a medium for practical jokes and particularly not to sign your letters with other people's names.

Address letters for publication to Our Air Mail, Ranch Romances, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

Fourth is the Charm

Dear Editor:

I've been reading RANCH ROMANCES for a long time, but I'd like to get in on the real fun as well as anyone else. The third time did fail in my case, and this is my fourth letter to Our Air Mail. I'm a girl of 23, with a sense of humor, and I'd like to hear from boys and girls my own age.

JO WEBSTER

Route 3, Box 433
Greensboro, N. C.

Desire Accomplished

Dear Editor:

As I am a buyer of your honorable magazine, I would like to accomplish my desire to be on the pen pal page. To many I have written, but none have answered me. I like so much letter writing, and I desire to correspond with all parts of the earth. I am 16 years of age, interested in sports, films and stamps. I end my letter hoping to receive your earliest result and see my address.

ORESTE VINCENTI

P. O. Box 1866
Haifa
Palestine

It's a Pretty Name

Dear Editor:

I've tried every way I can think of to get pen pals, but I guess nobody likes the sound of my name. I wish you would write my plea in your magazine—to give me another chance. I'm 18 years old with dark brown hair and green eyes. I love to cook.

LELA CHRISTENSEN

Box 455
American Falls, Ida.

Mary's Starved for Pen Pals

Dear Editor:

Would somebody consider writing to a deaf-mute girl? I'm lonely and starved for correspondence. I'm brown-eyed with reddish-brown hair, and I'm married and have a year old daughter. I would welcome letters from all over the world.

MARY RUTH SMALL

319 Wine St., Apt. 1
Richmond, Calif.

Singing Slim

Dear Editor:

I'm a happy-go-lucky guy without a care in the world, and plumb anxious to get a corralful of letters. I'm 25, known to all my friends as Singing Slim. To the first 25 gals who write and enclose pictures of themselves, I'll send them a picture of myself on my horse dressed in full cowboy regalia.

KEN SABEAN

24 Ashdale Avenue
Fairview, Halifax Co.
Nova Scotia
Canada

Calling Young Fry

Dear Editor:

A few days ago my aunt gave me a copy of RANCH ROMANCES, and it was the best reading I've ever had. I read Our Air Mail and wished I could get in on it too, but there was nobody my age, so I'm writing to you in the hope of getting some younger pen pals. I'm 12, stand 5'2" tall, and weigh about 133. My hobby is woodcraft, and I like to hunt.

CURTIS SPICKELMIER

Box 17
Silverton, Colo.

Just Dyin'

Dear Editor:

Have you-all got a little bit of room for a Texas gal who's just dyin' for letters. I'm 14 with brown hair and blue eyes. I hope my box gets real full.

BILLIE FERN CARTER

Box 482
Wellington, Tex.

Good Luck to a Prospector

Dear Editor:

I'm attending Arizona State College under the GI Bill of Rights, and I have plenty of time for pen pals from all over. My father and I are planning a prospecting trip up into the Superstitious Mountains—perhaps we'll find the Lost Dutchman Mine, beginner's luck. Come on, pals, write, and we'll give you first hand information on our adventure.

ARTHUR D. MAGEE
Green Gables-Room 34
Arizona State College
Tempe, Ariz.

A Fan in Egypt

Dear Editor:

I have been reading your magazine for over a year now, and I think it's just tops. Could you please publish my name so that I can have pen pals from other countries? I would very much like to hear about people in the USA.

NINETTE SASSON
17 (b) Sharia Sakakini, 17
Cairo, Egypt

Music and Muscles

Dear Editor:

Who's interested in hillbilly music and also in physical culture for health? I'd like to exchange ideas along those lines. I'm 39, single and an ex-sailor, a vet of World War II.

OTIS BECK
Camden, Ill.

Two Canadians

Dear Editor:

How about helping two Canadian girls get acquainted with some of your readers? We've both appeared in a moving picture, danced in a festival and had our pictures in the paper. We take an interest in everything, but hockey, dancing and writing long letters head the list. We're both 14. Who'll take an interest in us?

ELSIE SHYRYN
1024 15th Ave., West
Calgary, Alta.
Canada

JEANNE KOROPECKI
Rosedale, Alta.
Canada

Poetic Plea

Dear Editor:
Hello, folks, far and near.
Take a look and see who's here.
Kalamazoo is from where I hail.
Woncha fill my box with mail?
Ages 30 to 40 suit me best,
But I'll answer all the rest.

MRS. JOY CARPENTER
1411 Race St.
Kalamazoo, Mich.

Ranger

Dear Editor:

I'm employed by the forestry division and have many lonely hours. I'd like to exchange letters and photographs with people between the ages of 16 and 35.

RALPH W. MEYERS
Box 656
Taft, Calif.

British Tommy

Dear Editor:

I'm a British soldier, and my home is in London, where I have 3 brothers and 3 sisters, so I'm very lonely way out here. I'm 20, 5'4" tall and not bad looking. And I'm also an all-around sportsman. More than anything else, I'd like to have pen friends.

PTE. JOHN LILLIS, 14179082
HQ Co.
2nd Bn. Buffs.
Hong Kong
Far East Land Forces

West Virginian

Dear Editor:

Here's another reader of your wonderful magazine. I've been at it for 8 years now, so how about a space for me in Our Air Mail? I'm a young miss with greyish-blue eyes, 5'4", fond of all outdoor sports. I have several hobbies—collecting stamps, souvenirs and hankies. I hope people in the Services and in hospitals especially will get their pens and pencils going and give this gal a break.

SALLIE D. CHOPICH
Windsor Heights, W. Va.

KNOW YOUR WEST

Answers to the questions on page 83

1. Button, post, biskit, nubbin, apple, stob, Lizzie.

2. No. The only wild caribou ranging on U.S.A. territory are in Alaska.

3. Shorthorns, which may be red, roan, etc.

4. Yellowstone in Wyoming, Twin and Shoshone in Idaho, Great and Kootenai in Montana, Little Niagara in Oklahoma, Multnomah in Oregon, Yosemite in California, Kettle and Snoqualmie in Washington, and others.

5. Howdy.

6. Wyoming.

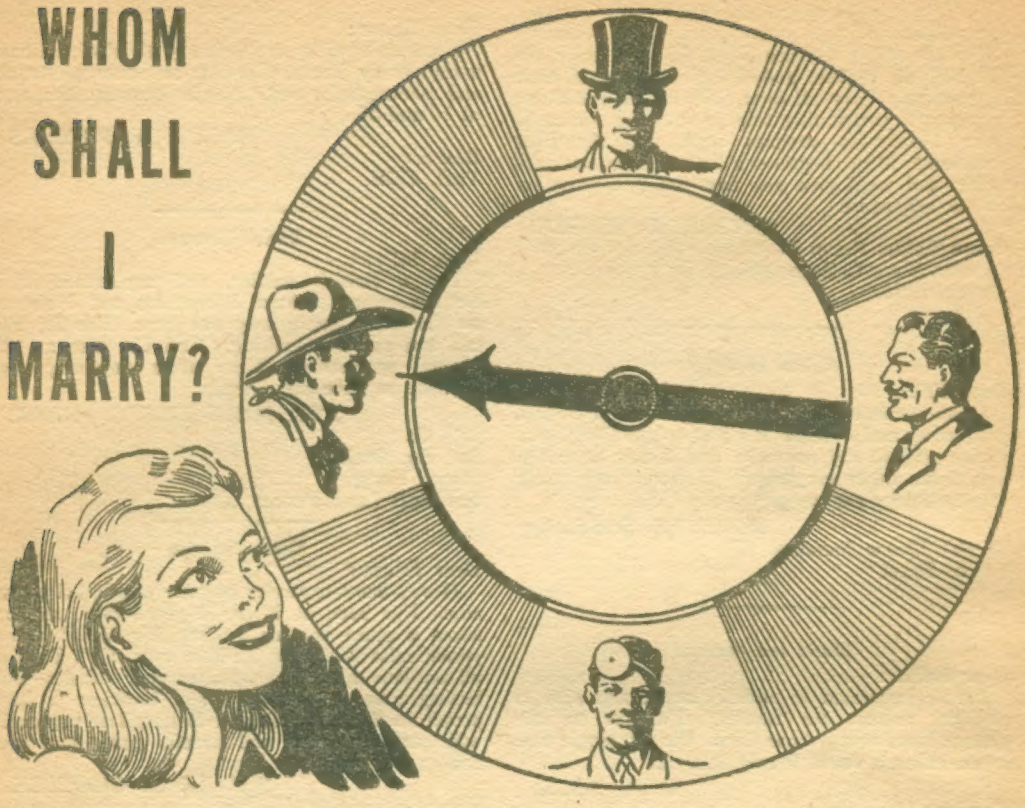
7. Furnishes him with grub (food) and other supplies on the promise of a share in whatever valuable minerals the prospector may find.

8. That he worked all winter just for his board on a ranch where hay is fed to livestock.

9. Colorado, flowing north into Wyoming, then southeast into Nebraska.

10. Oklahoma.

WHOM SHALL I MARRY?



Man of Taurus *April 22—May 21*

By Professor Marcus Mari

WHEN THE SUN enters the constellation containing the stars known as the Hyades and Pleiades, the zodiacal sign of Taurus the Bull takes over, and both fortunate and strong are the men born under it. These men are practical, sometimes stern, determined and forceful. They have a large sense of duty, of obligation to others, and an unswerving integrity.

Taurus men are apt to be extroverted—that is, their thoughts and deeds are for and toward others. They are not so much concerned with their own person as they are with well-being of the people surrounding them. They are unselfish, sincerely so. And they are avid after knowledge and information, never being content with "a little learning." They have a fine capacity for enjoying life, and are a good deal sought after socially.

The man of Taurus can dance half the night away and attack his work with vigor in the morning. He is a real man to work with or for.

Women enjoy his company because of his masculinity and unpredictable gayety. They should realize, however, that he is quickly intolerant of coquetry and hateful of insincerity. And once he gives his word or his heart, it is given forever.

You may receive a personal reading by sending this coupon to Professor Mari, in care of Ranch Romances, 515 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. ENCLOSE STAMPED AND SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE. (Canadians enclose 3 cents instead of stamps.)

NAME..... Sex.....

ADDRESS.....

Exact date of birth: Year..... Month..... Date of Birth..... 5-14-48

What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a nonprofit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

Not For General Distribution

Sincere men and women, in search of the truth —those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for a complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe H. K. X.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

LOOK for Rupture HELP!

Why put up with days . . . months . . . YEARS of discomfort, worry and fear—if we can provide you with the support you want and need? Learn NOW about this perfected truss-invention for most forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire . . . you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy most of life's activities and pleasures once again. To work . . . to play . . . to live . . . to love . . . with the haunting Fear of Rupture lessened in your thoughts! Literally *thousands* of Rupture sufferers *have* entered this *Kingdom of Paradise Regained* . . . have worn our support without the slightest inconvenience. Perhaps we can do as much for you. Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless, do not *despair*. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 44,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

Never Loses a Day's Work in Shipyard

"A few weeks ago I received the Appliance you made for me. Wouldn't do without it now. My fellow workers notice how much better I can do my work and get around over these ships—and believe me, the work in a Navy shipyard is anything but easy. I never lose a day's work now."—J. A. Comer, 1505 Green Ave., Orange, Texas.

Perfect Relief—Full Satisfaction

"Your truss gives FULL SATISFACTION. I feel it my moral duty to testify to the world:—(A)—That I have been ruptured 45 years. (B)—was operated on scientifically ten years ago when 76 years of age; but the rupture returned soon. Have tried everything; but only now do I find PERFECT RELIEF in your appliance."—Lee R. Stroud, 601 E. Grove St., Kaufman, Texas.

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives *Wonderful Protection*

Think of it! Here's a surprising yet simple-acting invention that helps Nature support the weakened muscles gently but securely, day and night. Thousands of grateful letters express heartfelt thanks for relief from pain and worry,—results beyond the expectations of the writers. What is this invention—how does it work? Will it help me? Get the complete, fascinating facts on the Brooks Air-Cushion Appliance—send now for *free* Rupture Book.

Cheap—Sanitary—Comfortable

Rich or poor—ANYONE can afford to buy this remarkable, LOW-PRICED rupture invention! But look out for imitations and counterfeits. The Genuine Brooks Air-Cushion truss is never sold in stores or by agents. Your Brooks is made up after your order is received, to fit your particular case. You buy direct at the low "maker-to-user" price. The perfected Brooks is sanitary, lightweight, inconspicuous. Has no hard pads to gouge painfully into the flesh, no stiff, punishing springs, no metal girdle to rust or corrode. It is GUARANTEED to bring you heavenly comfort and security or it costs NOTHING. The Air-Cushion works in its own unique way—softly, silently doing its part in providing protection. Learn what this patented invention may mean to you—send the coupon quick!

C. E. BROOKS, Inventor

SENT ON TRIAL!

No . . . don't order a Brooks now . . . FIRST get the complete, revealing explanation of this world-famous rupture invention. THEN decide whether you want to try for the comfort—the wonderful degree of freedom—the security—the blessed relief that thousands of men, women and children have reported. They found our invention the answer to their prayers! And you risk NOTHING in making the TEST, as the complete appliance is SENT ON TRIAL. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate this no-risk trial. Send for the facts—now—today—hurry! All correspondence strictly confidential.

FREE! Latest Rupture Book Explains All!

Sent You in Plain Envelope **JUST CLIP and SEND COUPON**

MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

BROOKS APPLIANCE CO.
153-A State St., Marshall, Mich.

Without obligation, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER—all in plain envelope.

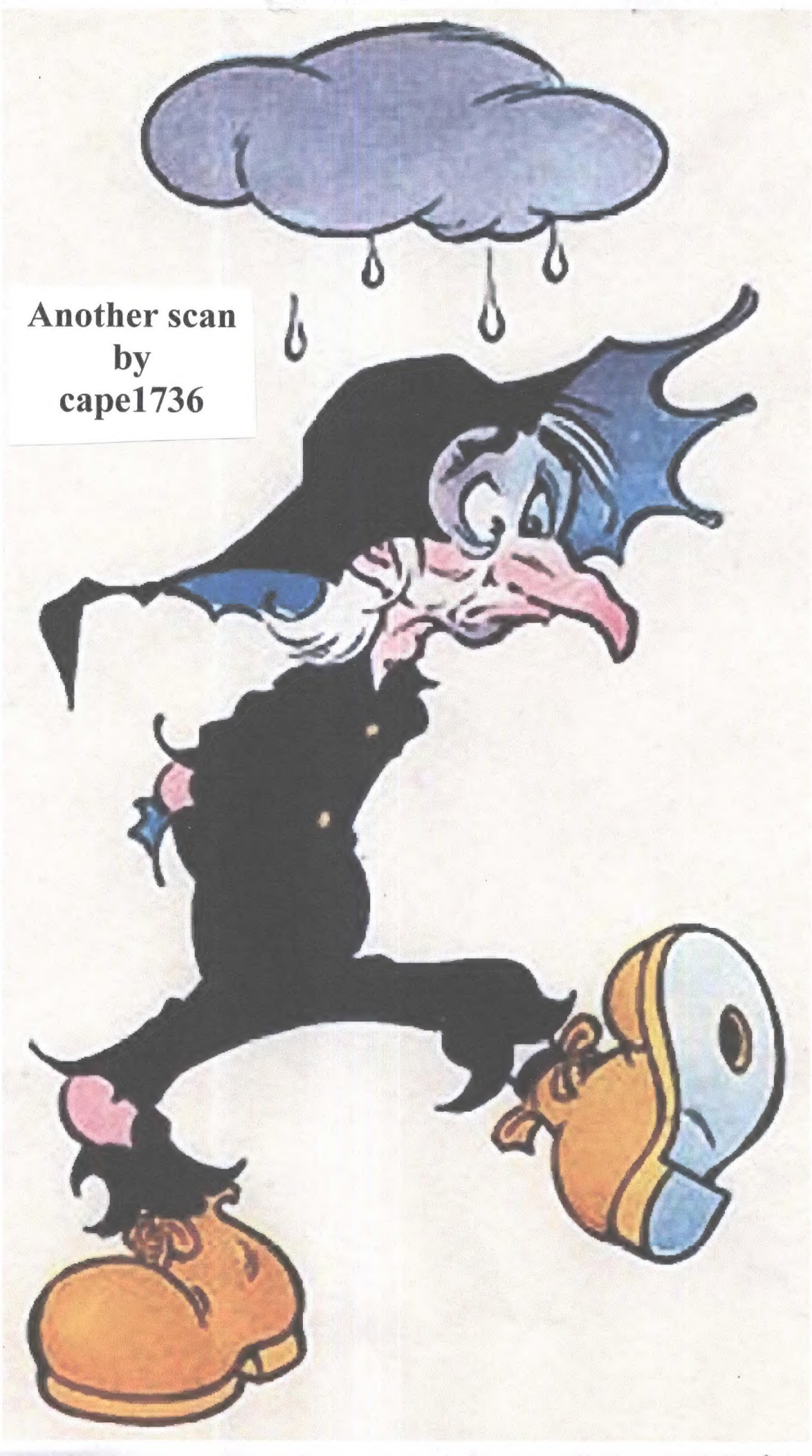
Name .....

Street .....

City..... State.....

State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐

Brooks Appliance Co., 153-A State St., Marshall, Mich.


Another scan
by
cape1736